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ABSTRACT

Intended for high school students, this book contains a collection of personal accounts of Vietnam and the Vietnam War by American and Vietnamese soldiers. An introductory paragraph suggests that one excellent way for students to learn the lessons of the Indochina war is through the words of the soldiers who fought it. Narratives, excerpts from diaries, interviews, and poems are included. Discussion questions are suggested throughout the book. In each of the accounts the soldiers are confronted with a situation which demands a choice involving their basic beliefs and sometimes their lives. War presents these dilemmas in their most dramatic form, but the questions which are raised are ones which students will very likely face in their own lives. A bibliography of print and media for students wanting to further study the Vietnam War is provided. A glossary of unfamiliar words is included. (Author/RM)

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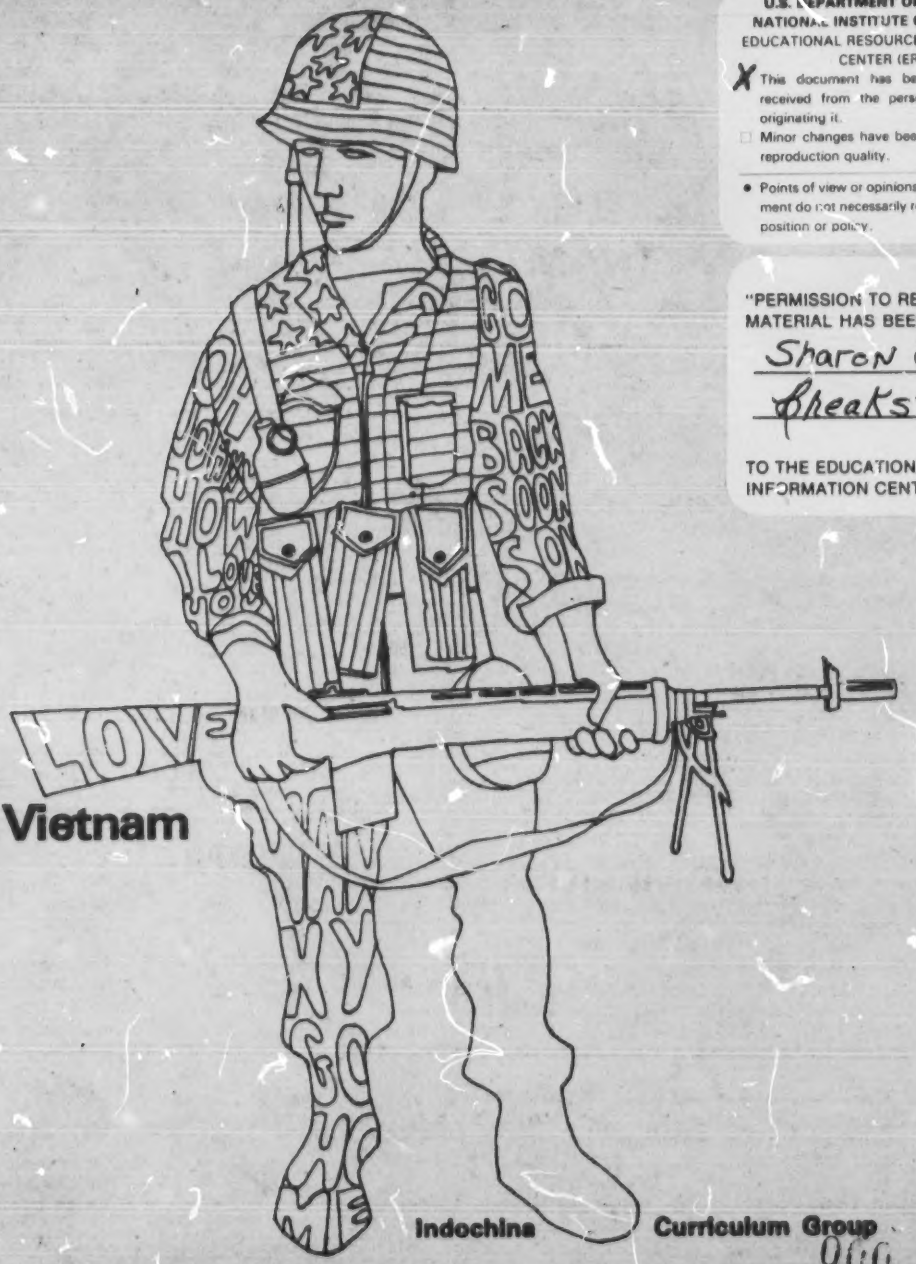
FRONT LINES

Soldiers' writings from Vietnam



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Indochina Curriculum Group

CHINA
NORTH VIETNAM
Hanoi
Haiphong
Unknown NLF Soldier
LAOS
GULF OF TONKIN
July 22, 1954 Division Line
Le Vanh Minh
Da Nang
THAILAND
William Calley
SOUTH VIETNAM
CAMBODIA
Rick Springman
Bruce Anello
Cam Ranh Bay
Grunts
Saigon
Mekong Delta
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SOUTH CHINA SEA
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RUSSIA
JAPAN
CHINA
PACIFIC OCEAN
Midway Island
Frank Elkins
Wake Island
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VIETNAM
PHILIPPINES
AUSTRALIA

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PHOTO AND ART CREDITS

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1. WIN magazine, May 15, 1971.
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INTRODUCTION

One place to learn the lessons of the Indochina war is in the words of the soldiers who fought in it. This book is a collection of personal accounts by American and Vietnamese soldiers. Their words come out of the immediacy of war and and the dilemmas it raises for them.

In each of these accounts the soldiers are confronted with a situation which demands a choice involving their basic beliefs and sometimes their lives. War presents these dilemmas in their most dramatic form, but the questions are ones we all face in our own lives.

To help you understand the reading:

A number of names and initials are used to refer to two opposing groups of Vietnamese:

1. The ARVN is the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. Its government is based in the south of Vietnam, mainly in the city of Saigon. ARVN is fighting with the aid of the United States military forces and is financed by the United States.

2. The NLF, or National Liberation Front, is a coalition of groups in the south fighting against foreign control of South Vietnam and for the reunification of Vietnam. The United States military and the press refer to its armed forces as VIETCONG, VC, CHARLIE, or COMMUNISTS.

The NVA, or North Vietnamese Army, is the army of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the government in the north of Vietnam. They support the National Liberation Front.

GOOK, SLANT, and DINK are terms used by some Americans to describe Vietnamese people. Some of these words, which express contempt for the Vietnamese, are based on physical differences between Vietnamese and Americans: "slant" refers to eye shape; "dink" (from "dinky") refers to size.

As some of the soldiers explain in their stories, they were encouraged by the military to look down on the Vietnamese people as inferior.

The Indochina Curriculum Group is a collective of Boston-area high school teachers and scholars developing materials for high schools on Southeast Asia. This book is one of a series on the Indochina War.

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Bruce Anello, a young sergeant in the Army, wonders if he has become a "pawn in the game," trapped in a vast process over which he has no control. Afraid that the brutality of the war is numbing his feelings, he puts his confusion and pain into the words of his diary. His thoughts raise questions for us all: What are our options when caught in a situation where playing the game by the rules means denying our feelings and beliefs?

Bruce Anello

Bruce Anello

BRUCE ANELLO

On May 31, 1968, Sgt. Bruce A. Anello—Buddy, to his family and friends—was killed in action in Vietnam.

Buddy, born August 24, 1947, was the third of four brothers. When his mother died in 1951 Buddy's father found himself unable to both support and adequately care for his sons, so Buddy and his brothers were sent to the Milton Hershey School for orphaned boys. It was here that Buddy lived from age four until he finished high school, except for short vacations at home. Particular interests he developed during these years were music and wrestling. He was considered an outstanding performer on both drums and piano, but in Vietnam he seemed able to play whatever instrument came to hand.

After graduation Buddy worked for the Philadelphia Electric Company for a year, then spent three happy months in San Francisco visiting his eldest brother Don. In Haight Ashbury, his first real taste of independence, he met a girl he hoped to return to. When his father sent word an induction notice had come, Buddy obediently returned to Philadelphia.

Dave Lang was inducted the same day as Buddy. They became close friends and remained together throughout basic training at Ft. Hood, Texas, and in Vietnam. Dave read much of the diary as Buddy was writing it. Dave is sure we have here the complete text of the diary. He points out that Buddy was writing constantly—poems, letters, things for the diary.

The diary stops several weeks before Buddy was killed. Following the text of the diary is an interview with Dave Lang, filling in those final weeks, plus other reminiscences of Buddy.

Buddy was awarded the Purple Heart, the Silver Star, the Military Merit Medal and a marksmanship citation. He was also given a medal from the Army of South Vietnam.

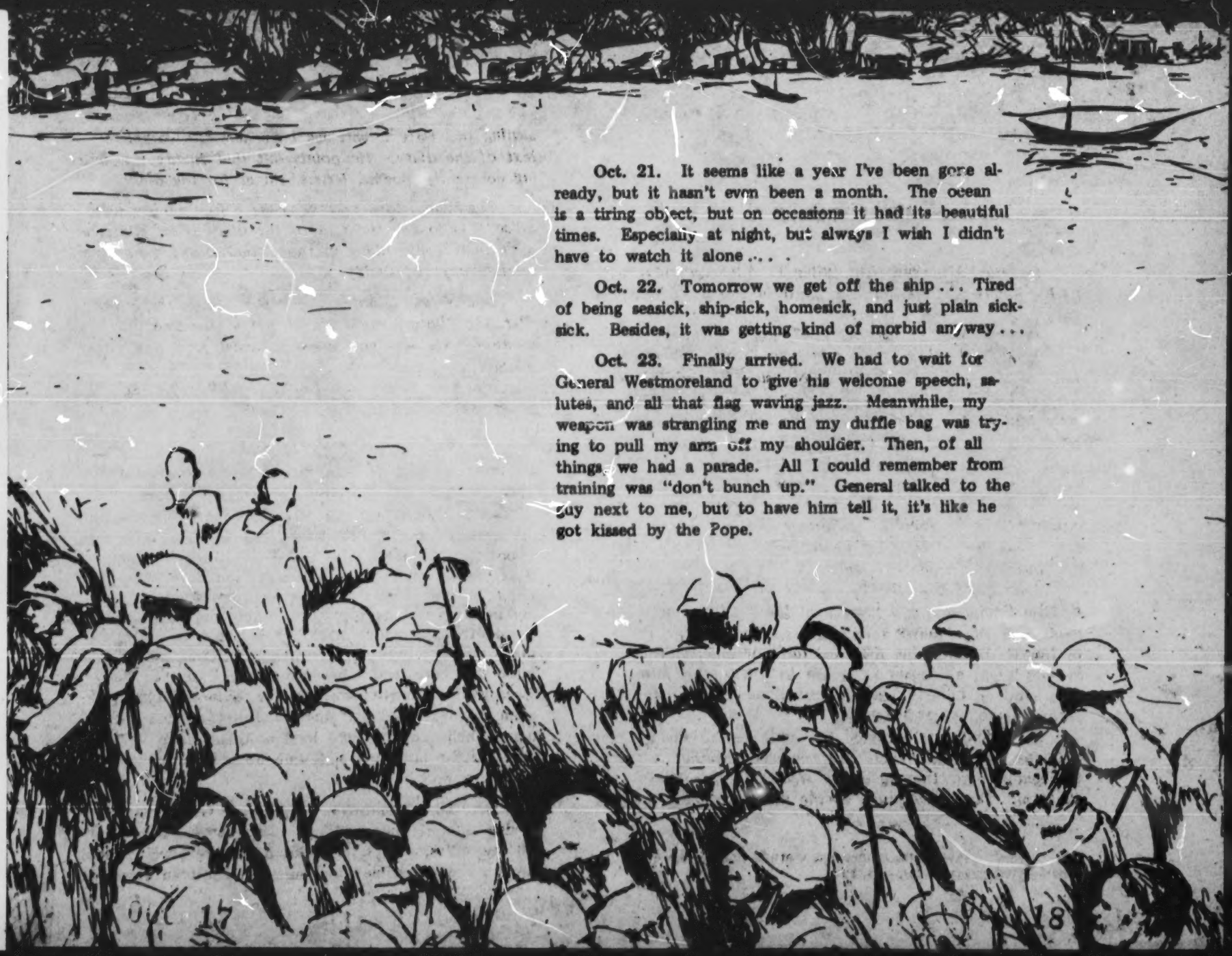
When he died in Dragon Valley, Vietnam, Sgt. Bruce Anello was twenty years old.

---

from "A Pawn in the Game: The Vietnam Diary of Sgt. Bruce Anello," WIN Magazine, May 15, 1971.

Oct. 16, 1967. It all starts in the San Francisco Bay. Feelings are the color of the ship. Gray. I look at the night and the city lights and remember all the beautiful things I've done there—and I have to turn. I look at the bridge with the many people traveling their happy way, but not knowing the ship below carries a load of deep thought. And the lights play on my mind. So I have to turn. Just three miles away, behind the old smoke stack. You can't see it. But that's where I live. I know it's there, but they don't know I'm here, and I have to turn. I turn to the faces whose thoughts are just like mine and only seem to make the ship grayer. And the stars offer me no help 'cause now I look at them alone. So I turn for the last time and walk away with my eyes to the ground.

Oct. 18. Tomorrow we pass the Golden Gate Bridge and everyone will say, "Isn't it beautiful," and I'll say, "Yes, wasn't it." But hopes are always there, for it's not a terrible long time. It's just an eternity.



Oct. 21. It seems like a year I've been gone already, but it hasn't even been a month. The ocean is a tiring object, but on occasions it had its beautiful times. Especially at night, but always I wish I didn't have to watch it alone . . . .

Oct. 22. Tomorrow we get off the ship . . . Tired of being seasick, ship-sick, homesick, and just plain sick-sick. Besides, it was getting kind of morbid anyway . . .

Oct. 23. Finally arrived. We had to wait for General Westmoreland to give his welcome speech, salutes, and all that flag waving jazz. Meanwhile, my weapon was strangling me and my duffle bag was trying to pull my arm off my shoulder. Then, of all things, we had a parade. All I could remember from training was "don't bunch up." General talked to the guy next to me, but to have him tell it, it's like he got kissed by the Pope.

Oct. 24. Still waiting for supplies before we move out. I was told I'm supposed to be a tunnel rat.* My platoon sergeant likes me (sarcasm).

Oct. 27. Left for another place today. Duc-Pho. It's finally back to C-rations [canned food] again... It rained all night. A trio of misery: cold, scared, and hungry.

Oct. 28. Why are we here? A question always on my mind... I think and stink a lot more... I think about what I'm going to do after I serve my two-year sentence for being an American citizen and what's Mary, Brother Don, Al, Bill, Papa Joe, Gwynne, Moreen, and the bus driver who left me off in Harlem and said good luck, thinking or doing right now...

Oct. 31. At 6 A.M. I get up and read the obituary column and if I'm not listed, I go eat breakfast.

Nov. 2. The hardest day so far. Close to 80 pounds of junk on my back, raining like hell and we're tramping through the rice paddies... A man got blown up last night by our own artillery. Who can you trust?

Nov. 5. Should have gotten a combat medal for fighting off thousands of mosquitos last night. No sleep for the weary.

Nov. 9. Our ambush—with the rain beating on my helmet. Not a drop coming in, so it trickles round my neck and soaks into my skin. While my finger's on the trigger frozen with fear and from the wind... haven't fired a shot yet. Nor has one come my way. Just frustration and harassment.

*tunnel rat: soldier assigned to search for hidden supplies of weapons or food in underground tunnels.

Nov. 10. Finally a day off. I'm very lonely today. And still no mail, no newspaper... I'll sit here and smoke and ponder and get lonelier...

Nov. 11. No bullets my way. No bullets returned. It's the best way to fight a war—that's what I've learned.

Nov. 21. Lost respect for a bunch of people today. For no reason they tore down this hootch,* burnt it, tramped down their garden, ripped out their trees and there wasn't even any suspected enemy. I told him I hope someone kicks in his TV tube while he's over here. Like he said: "Just to let them know we're here." Really made me sick, but what am I to do? Stand and watch and forget. The last may never happen.

Nov. 25. Back to hoofing and humping again. Froze last night. But how do you write it? It's hard to explain the cold to someone who's warm . . .

Dec. 6. When will it ever end? You can't fight what you can't see, yet we walk like we're in a shooting gallery. You ask, "How can we find them?" and they say, "When he shoots at you." Yet we walk and walk. The major sits at his desk smelling of starch, saying, "There's a lost regiment out there somewhere. Search till you find them." And I ask, "How do we find them?" and he says, "Wait till they shoot at you."

Dec. 8. I'm so tired. Is it real? Yes, but why be sad, when nothing will change your sorrows; why be angry, for there's nothing to release your anger on. Why be happy when it's nothing really to be happy about. So I exist.

Feelings are void, emotions are gone, reactions are numb. Am I wrong for this?

I'm just tired, and hate to fall asleep, only to wake up to it all again.

Dec. 10. How can I describe an ambush? Through poem it may sound pretty. In conversation it may sound exciting; in thought it's undescribable. But I will try:

Darkness comes, and the clouds turn black with threatening rain, and the moon can barely seep through. It's the signal to move to the trail where the man died yesterday. An eerie feeling creeps in your whole being as the beautiful trees of daytime turn into laughing demons from the cold night wind. You lie on the damp ground hungry from the day's long march. Eight men and eight individual thoughts of home and how it used to be. One thinking of a quiet sunny morning at a deserted beach. With the sand warming his bare feet, as he goes into the sunrise with his surfboard. Another playing in the backyard with his son that he's never seen. And another laughing and loving with his girl, just grooving down the streets.

And among my many thoughts I think of a warm fireplace with reflections of peace and quietness thrown from a flickering light . . .

Then it starts to sprinkle and you pray it don't rain, 'cause you're cold already. You need a cigarette and the mosquitos are hell but you must keep quiet. You look at your watch and the luminous dials say only an hour has passed. Nine more hours and a thousand deaths to go. Then once again you walk all day, eat little, get wearier, and thank God you're alive, and that it didn't rain.

Dec. 18. These search-and-destroy missions† are really getting quite boring. Climbing hills, going through rice paddies, hacking away at vines and thorns, crawling in holes (tunnels). Hell, a hole's a hole. You've seen one hole, you've seen them all. And I've seen a lot of holes in the army.

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*hootch: slang used by GI's to describe their living quarters Vietnamese homes in the countryside.

†search—and—destroy missions: United States military operations intended to clear an area of all people and buildings.

Dec. 24. Christmas Eve—Ho ho! Today I fought a war. Instead of the Yule tide burning, it was a village. Instead of Christmas lights it was artillery. Instead of the white snow, it was rain. Instead of warm smiles, it was a weary frown. Instead of bells ringing out, it was bullets. Instead of laughter, it was mothers crying. Instead of presents, it was a booby trap. Instead of pain, it was a man saying, "I'm going home." Instead of peace and good will, it was war and sorrow. But be still, for today Christ was born.

Dec. 29. We've been trying to get in out of the field for three days now. So far we've had sniper fire for the whole time out. Plus two booby traps, killing one and wounding some . . . It's been cold and wet and bloody. So the major comes out in his chopper and says, "I'm sorry, but the weather's too bad to send in any choppers to get you out." Then he flies away, leaving us with a new mission. He's got to get back before his coffee gets cold and his cookies go stale.

Jan. 7, 1968. Sgt. Taylor—platoon sergeant. A hypocrite, more so than an egotist. It's hard to decipher whether he's serious or not. He talks just for the sake of giving a command. But like all high ranking men, well, not all but most, he keeps his opinion to himself in order not to be busted. In other words—him first. You know, it's really boring to even talk about them. So the hell with it.

Jan. 10. The people don't stand a chance. On patrol we came across a hut with a big pole and one wire on it which he showed us was connected to his transistor radio for better reception.

The colonel came in his chopper and said, "Rip it down 'cause it looks like a transmitting place for the enemy." Plus the people were taken as suspects.

Then the colonel said a couple huts had too much rice so we had to bag it and send it in. The lady started taking a fit when we started. Meanwhile the colonel left. So the lady was dying and all the people crying . . . We sent word to take the woman on a medevac. But the colonel said, "It's not our problem. Can't spare the gas." And this is a friendly village. Or was a friendly village.

Jan. 12. Even here they hound me about a haircut. Like they don't have nothing else to worry about. A guy in our platoon shot a civilian today. He personally was sorry. But the platoon sarge said we should have burnt his I.D. and put a grenade in his pocket. The squad leader put a note on him when the chopper took him away, saying he didn't have an I.D. and he ran. I'm tired of living with these sadists.

Jan. 13. Even I've become kind of hard myself. Screaming on little kids. In general, giving the Vietnamese people a hard time. So be it—you just get the feeling that you don't care any more. Let it all hang out.

I look at things no longer as beauty but just as objects. I walk among the objects, seeing no color.

Jan. 14. A letter came—from Mary even.

Today, January 14, declared as a new holiday. It was so beautiful I cried. I can't even express how it made me feel. A lot of words wouldn't mean half enough of how good I feel. I was gonna read the envelope for three days, then open it, read the heading for the next three days, and one sentence per 3 days. It should last me until the next letter.

Jan. 24. Today I got the idiot badge pinned on me. I am now sergeant Anello. I must have qualified in the heights of stupidity. To me it means I'm still a pfc [Private First Class], I'm just making more money . . .

Jan. 31. Our company's been blessed. The last area we left, "A" company took over and the very next day, the V.C. hit them hard. We left the bridge yesterday, which was a whole month there. Again "A" company took over. Just today the V.C. attacked the bridge with a good size force.

Feb. 3. It's funny how the less time you have here, the more scared you get. It gets harder to sleep at nights. Every little noise wakes you up. Smoking cigarettes under your poncho almost chokes you. It would be nice to look at the stars while smoking, but you got to watch the light.

Monsoon season's just about over and the mosquitos are coming back full force. At night you have to cover your head with the poncho linen—which is sheer hell, 'cause your poncho linen smells like the condensing of 80 million locker rooms.

Feb. 6. I am but a mule, carrying the load of two camels. Then again, I'm more of an ass for doing it. Why couldn't I have been a clerk? Another week of this and I'll turn into one huge back muscle and two big calves.

Feb. 10. One day in hell.

A broken mirror
shows my reflection,
but not as it really is.
Past—one day of blood
coming—a continuing flood
of fools such as I,
caught in
the eyes of destruction.
For each felled man
death brings peace.
I wonder if it's as
cold and ugly as here.
It's just a thought for a moment
in the middle of an explosion.

Passing quickly through the mind
shaking the body with fear.
Retreat to the road
and rest for a spell,
light up a cigarette
and enjoy the smell
of the grass not yet burnt
with gun powder.
Try not to think of the dead
left behind.
'Tis not nearly all.
I have to tell of the feelings I felt
in one day of hell.
The rest remains in terrified eyes
and in the hollows
of each man's mind.

Feb. 12. This battle probably hit the news. Enough people died to satisfy the press. It's a sickening thought as I watch the helicopters carry the bodies . . . But I admire the spirit of the V.C. But who wouldn't have spirit? They have a cause to die for, it's their country. We have nothing to gain. We don't even want the country. So what is to win—when we have nothing to win?

Feb. 13. Escalate—escalate—escalate. We're not ahead of the game. Numbers is not going to win. I'm supposed to switch companies after this mission. Replacements have come in and they need some old hands to help out . . .

Feb. 15. Been without my boots for two days. Got some sort of jungle rot or swamp disease. Medics told me to keep it air cleaned. All this clean country air. It's like sticking my feet in a glue factory.

It's a bad way to start in a new company though. First impression—shammer. But I care less sometimes. I'm tired of this place and all its silly military war games. Are you a hero or are you not a hero? Medals don't buy more bread or clear a conscience.

Feb. 19.

I play the part
of the fool patriot
without a cause.
A clear conscience,
a closed mind,
this ignorant patriot
sees, but is blind
to what really is,
and now was.
I hate not these people,
I hate not the land,
I hate but the person
with his peace waving hand
starts a war and wants
everyone else to fight it.

Bruce with some of his army buddies.

Feb. 24. Seems every other thought is of being home. Yet, it's still a long time to go. It only depresses me. But it's hard not to think about it. You wake up in the morning, thinking what it would be like in a warm bed. You start cooking some cans and you wonder what it would be like to sit at a table with a cup of coffee. You brush the dirt off your clothes and you wonder how a warm shower would feel . . . Then the man tells you to pack up and sling it all on your back. And you wonder what it would be like to be free, instead of always fighting for it.

Feb. 26.

Too much blood.
The days get longer,
the sun gets stronger.
As I get weaker,
things look bleaker.
The truth fades,
my mind evades.
Reason
'tis treason.
No longer for peace,
insanities increase.
I kill for no reason!

Mar. 1. The captain has no faith in his men whatsoever. The lieutenant said, "If you have any opinions, keep them to yourself." A self-made God. The captain is even higher than God. He told us: "Don't ask me why I tell you something to do, if you don't you'll die."

I got to get out of here. The man drives you insane. I no longer am fighting the enemy. My mind just seems to be fighting the army. Both is too much. The morale is so low that fights are breaking out among the troops. Because of being pushed and on edge. It's time for us to take a turn—mutiny.

Mar. 2. And so continues the same harassment. Things that we've been doing the whole time in VN are wrong to the captain. Excuse me, the dictator. The captain also is a fast talker, so it would take a pretty good statesman or a pile of fists to change things. But the last would only make things worse. Though it would be a hell of a lot of fun doing it. The whole platoon put in 1049's [Army forms] to get out of the company. It would be impossible to get out but at least there will be an investigation.

Mar. 3. I'm carrying so much junk that I could go out to the boondocks and win the war myself. Or at least raise some hell. Two grenades, a claymore—100 machine gun rounds. Two gas grenades, two smoke. Armor jacket, gas mask, 300 rifle rounds. That's not counting sleeping equipment or "C" rations which is 4 meals. Then there's the sun. A girl from Berkeley wrote me this blessing, "May the sun kiss you on the head." I don't think she knows her own power. It keeps beating down on my head all right. Right through the steel pot.

Mar. 5. Another ambush—each one is a little different, that's why I write about them. Each is scary in its own way. Took 2 new cruits with me last night. They kept waking me up on their guard. Hearing sounds. So I told them what I've learned to build their confidence. "If the sound you hear is an animal, it's no problem. If it shoots at you, you know it wasn't an animal. . . "

Mar. 6. The captain is kill crazy. It brings more glory to him if we get any kills. Yet, he doesn't do the dirty work. He sleeps with a perimeter all around him. Sends out 5 men ambushes and prays for a kill. I came in this morning and he asked me if I heard anything. I said: "Ya!" and he got all excited. "What was it? What was it?" I said the wind, crickets, and a few imaginary animals. He said: "Better luck next time, maybe you'll get something."

I told him it's o.k. I like it just the way it was. Where I can come walking in the morning with all my limbs and no extra holes. I gained no points with him. Hell, I'm no scorekeeper.

Mar. 10. I'm really digging this new company. Digging foxholes every night. Digging rice out of crocks. Digging a place to sleep. As god, our captain, says, it's better to be digging foxholes than for us to dig your grave. A morbid sense of humor. I've turned into a true slave. Every day seems like two and every week seems like a month. And every month . . .

Mar. 11. I'm writing by the light of the moon. It's full tonight, along with my mind. Everything is full, except my stomach. Another day of taking rice. He's trying to get the rice record. It's either break the record or break our backs. And there's nothing we can do.

Only when I go out on patrols I don't even look with my squad. Never found any myself. So the captain has us looking all day. I go out, find a creek, a shady spot, and hang it up for a while.

Mar. 15. I can trip and twist my ankle, but not enough to get me out of the field, just enough to make it more miserable. Today a plank broke when I was going across an 8-foot deep crater. The lieutenant, the medic, and a couple other people were yelling down at me. "Are you hurt?" "Are you all right?" I looked up and said, "I hope not." I was hoping I broke a limb or something. But no, they all worked. They lifted me out. Nothing but gashes and bruises. More pain, but nothing to get me out of the field. I wish my guardian angel would just let up a little bit and cut me a break.

Mar. 16. For the last week now, we've been getting in a fire fight. I don't mind the fire fight so much, 'cause both the lieutenant and the captain are hiding somewhere. And it's about the only time they're

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not yelling at you. But after it's all over: "All right —let's get it on line, get your steel pots back on. Get down in that hole. How many rounds were you carrying? That's not enough. Don't let it happen again. Spread it out, spread it out, damnit." But where were they five minutes before? Build your ego with a loud mouth . . .

Mar. 18. It's like I have to start from last week and rewrite the same this week. A rerun. It's getting quite hot. It's not the malnutrition I need worry about anymore, it's evaporation. As far as the day goes, it's the same. Search and destroy. Or destroy, then search. Either way the farmers hate us.

Mar. 19. This morning I vowed that no matter what the lieutenant told me, I wouldn't make a nasty remark and get angry. That lasted about a half hour, which is an accomplishment. The man just wants to violate your mind. He's a puppet and wants me to be his puppet. He's been pulling the wrong strings though. So now, I'm no longer squad leader but a team leader, where I wanted to be anyway, with the responsibility of handing out malaria pills and candy.

Mar. 20. Looking back through the pages, I can now make a statement on all the facts I have thus far collected:

With a clear mind and, may I add, a clear conscience, I have inevitably conceived, through sub-dividing the greater portions of the days with extreme interest which I have faithfully and truthfully written, a conclusion to my many journeys and frightful experiences in this country, the Republic of Vietnam or whatever name it goes under by now. That is, I've been here 6 months and still don't know what the hell we're fighting for.

Mar. 21. Experience has taught me to keep my head down. It also has taught me to hold a leg up. A shrapnel wound can get you out of the field for two weeks. Two purple hearts get you out of the field permanently.

It's a hell of a way to go, but lately during firefights I seem to see a lot more arms and legs in the air. It's all nonchalant. But the people who work back at support and never get out to the field must be more frustrated. Just the other day, a guy shot himself in the head with a 45. Those first sergeants can really harass people.

Mar. 27. Captain Price and I never were on good terms. But I finally saw him today.

"How you doing, Bruce?" (shakes my hand)
"Fine, thank you sir." (shock wears off)
He looks up at me with his kill crazy grin.
"Heard you did an outstanding job, my boy. Real proud of you."
"Just self-defense, sir."
"That's not the way I heard it. Put you in for a Silver Star. How's that?"
"Can I trade it in for another Purple Heart?"
"Ha! Ha! You're a funny man."
Yeah! I know—I laugh a lot.

Mar. 29. The more I fill, the longer it is I've been here and that much shorter to go. If the last page meant home, I'd start tonight and fill the rest by morning. Throw away my steel pot, hang up my jock, catch a plane, wave at the turmoil below, and cry with joy as I breathe in a breath of freedom . . .

Mar. 30. I live on the love of life and the edge of death. And I feel the agony of both.

Mar. 31. I've experienced—all I've wanted to experience. Not a want, but more or less what there is for where I am—and it's all enough. But I have to go on. There is no other place to go, but on, and wait out my time . . .

April 1. I no longer care why it's happening. I just want to stop it, or it to stop . . .

I don't even know if this is for peace or not. Fighting in the name of peace. Every time I say that it gets more ridiculous. And I walk away laughing, watching I don't tramp on any trip wire. He who laughs last—laughs best.

April 4. It seems that the latest fad is to build up a kill record. Since our platoon got in that battle, we killed 45 V.C. The other platoons are jealous so now they kill any body—just to match our record. I've seen—skip it. I'll write about that later. I can say I've seen brutality to the utmost. Grossness, ridiculous and senseless killing. And no conscience whatsoever. I get the usual statement handed down since from the cavalry and Indians. "The only good gook is a dead gook."

April 6. Now back to what I've seen. The grossness of character. One guy walked up to this old man, asked him for an I.D. card. The old man didn't pull it out fast enough for him. So he blew him away. Then to add to it, he lit a cigarette and put it in the bullet hole in his head. People out in the fields running, so they mowed them down. When they went to check, it was an old woman and children. "They should know better than to run" was their excuse.

Another old man asked for a cigarette. They gave him one, put it in his mouth then busted his jaw. Rat patrol at night—things I've heard. Rape by bayonet point. Walk into a hootch and just blow them all down. Record it as a kill.

And they wonder why the war is taking so long. Why should anybody want to be V.C.? Yea America —we have power, we have strength. We fight for freedom, the name of peace, the name of God. And to me it's all in vain.

April 8. The early hour of the morn. A stillness, peace and tranquillity. The funky wild birds echo their caws across the valley. A slight mist covers the ground. The sun begins to filter through the fading clouds. A new day, new trials. It feels so beautiful. But it usually ends nowhere. Just for these few hours I feel the freedom of thought, and the closeness of nature. But also I feel the loss of having no one to share it with. The early hours of the morn, these few hours, it's all I've got—the rest of the day belongs to the war lords.

April 11. Received enemy fire, mortar fire, last night. You just sit there and hope it doesn't come in close. You can't fight it.

April 12. Get it all in 'cause I'm getting out.

Shades of blue
chain of fools
pull the strings
the war lords rule.
Pawns of flesh
manpower sign
self-made Gods
violate the mind.
Tools of battle
die for glory
the coward lea[illegible]
tell the story.
Political circus

clowns of wisdom
rights and wrongs
draft-age confusion . . .
Losers win
winners lose
foreign country
brand new shoes.
Lousy dollar
makes enemies friends
forgotten dead
makes no sense . . .
Run in circles
blow my mind
five more months
of useless time.

April 14. I always seem to get to know the colonel through something that went wrong. Our hill was supposedly surrounded last night. So they took me and five guys to go out as observation post. We got to the location around 9:00. At 3:30 A.M. my man on guard went to sleep. So battalion headquarters couldn't contact us. They sent in a mortar round which woke me up. 6:30 we came in and I had a big lecture by the silver leaf. I didn't want to rat on the man. So I kept quiet.

April 19. First feelings of patrol is here we go again. Closer to the destination, the feeling is fear. But by the time you get there, you're so tired and frustrated, you just don't care what you hit. That's why they take you the longest and hardest route to get from point A to point B. Psychological warfare.

Finding a lot more propaganda sheets telling me to go home. Save enough of them up and I'm going to trade them in for a ticket . . .

April 24. The sweat runs down my forehead, as I lie in my mud hole. Ants crawling up my legs. Mosquitos buzzing around my ears. It's so dark the bushes take odd shapes and play on the imagination. Every fiber in my body feels like a leech. Every breeze blows the branches and my heart beats loud. I feel helpless. I'm not supposed to show my fear. So I whisper ridiculous comments that come to my head. But God, I'm in pain. I wish they would give me a break. Can't hold a cigarette straight—I swallow hard and put down my pen —and tomorrow go through it again.

April 28. Been using scout dogs on point lately. Two donut dollies (Red Cross) were flying with the scout and dog. And the dolly was asking questions about the animal. "Does the dog have to stay out in the fields? What a shame!"

Here the dog only comes out for four days. Gets five off. Not only that, it doesn't have to carry a rucksack. Oh, to live a dog's life—I'd be happy.

April 29. Getting mortared regularly now. Just get done digging your hole, it starts to rain, the sun goes down, and the mortars come in. It shakes you up quite a bit. If the war was like it has been for the last week, all the time there would be quite a few nervous breakdowns.

May 2. Walking on point today. Saw a man about 20 years old, so I yelled "La day" (meaning come here). He turned and saw me. His eyes went big—and he tore off running—so I shot him. He ran a hundred yards down some trails with his guts in his hand . . . The thought of what I did made me sick . . . I'm not proud of what I did.

May 3. I am what I am or what's left is what I am, and what I am is strung up—wound up, beat up, put up,—Ahh! Shut up. What I really am is nervous due to my leave coming up in a few days. Been wearing my steel pot lower and my flak jacket tighter. And the rounds keep coming in.

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May 4. Mortared again last night. After the shells stopped I walked over to White (our machine gunner) and said, "Wow! It's a happening!" He thought it was funny so I wrote it down.

Though in actual fact, a few minutes back I heard his prayers from my foxhole. Nerves of steel don't beat bits of shrapnel. Quite a few wounded. Nobody killed. But what bothers me is the guy who gets it the worst has the shortest time left in the country. It's a terrible thought—but it's true.

May 5. Came in from the field for an award ceremony (Purple Heart). The colonel didn't know what words to use to congratulate the wounded. I mean, "It gives me great pleasure to know you got shot," or "I'm proud to know that we have such brave individuals among my battalion who for their country had their leg in the wrong place at the wrong time." So instead he told us the history of the Purple Heart and we all saluted George Washington.

May 6. I felt great man, wow, finally being back at base camp—Ahhh! No more mortar fire—and what happens? Base camp gets mortared for the first time in 10 months and the V.C. tried to sneak in on the perimeter.

May 7. Why is it that the base camp warriors always give you a difficult time when you get a break to come in. Like getting wounded. They think you're shamming—so they put you on details. But also it's the little harassment, like we're different types of humans. The Negroes call it prejudice.

May 8. I feel kind of funny, knowing I'm going on leave and all my buddies are stuck in Dragon Valley. I'd be a fool to turn it down. But I just can't

get over the feeling that I'm letting them down. Of course if I was there and some dude cancelled his leave just to help out—I'd be calling him a fool too. I only hope nothing happens while I'm gone. It's a strong wish—due to circumstances. But I wish!

Dave Lang, who was with Bruce in Vietnam, was interviewed by staff members of WIN Magazine.

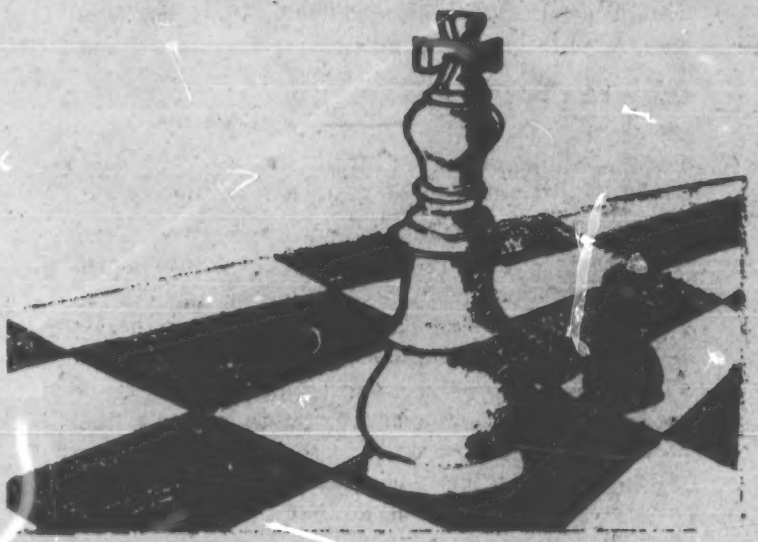
Buddy used to wear—I don't know where he got it, but somewhere he picked up a white Ramar of the Jungle hat. He used to tromp around with that. And his girl sent him red suspenders. You're supposed to wear these jungle fatigues, but he didn't like them, so he dug up a pair of the GI fatigues you wear in the States and he wore them—cut off jaggedy. You're supposed to tuck them in your boots but he just cut them off and they'd just flop around with his red suspenders and his Ramar of the Jungle hat. He had these little round glasses. That's the way he used to walk around —without a care in the world.

He was a big fan of Bob Dylan [popular singer]. He had a record, "A Pawn in the Game." That's the way buddy used to figure the war. When you think about it, it's true. He was just the pawn and the kings and queens were moving him around.

Being a sergeant he had access to the maps that the common foot soldier doesn't get. In his capacity as a squad leader he would bring this map over and say, "All right, here we are now. And the Big King is going to bring helicopters in and pick us up and put us over in this spot." Buddy saw it as a big chess game.

He didn't think as a sergeant, otherwise he'd have to call himself a rook or something. Even though he was a sergeant he still considered himself just a pawn —the lowest—a pawn in the game.

He used to wear the pawn on the side of his helmet. He also took his flak jacket and on the entire side of the back he drew a gigantic pawn in all different colors. He put a shield on it—a shield with a design sort of like a coat of arms—and in the center it



said, PEACE.

On the boat over, he had this cross. A gigantic Italian or German cross. It had nothing on it. It was brass. He got a pawn. He was going to fill the inside with glue or plaster of Paris and then somehow hook it onto his cross. Because he went under no preference. You'd say, "Why do you have a cross?" and he'd say, "Well, I don't know who to put on it because I don't know what religion I am and so I just have a cross." And then he came up with this idea to put a pawn there. And then he decided to put a black pawn. A black pawn rather than a white pawn because it signified it was bad. Everything had a symbol. Everything had a meaning behind it. He never got around to doing it. He got as far as cutting it in half.

Buddy mentions more or less in the beginning of the diary about a woman in whose house they found rice. They trampled through her gardens and they were supposed to take the rice. He protested against it and said he wouldn't do it. They had to get somebody else to do it. He absolutely refused to take any rice from this lady.

The United States government figures one woman should have one crock of rice and that's all. Any more than that means she's a sympathizer with the Viet Cong and she's probably feeding them. So they destroy everything.

Buddy couldn't see this because his philosophy is that people in Vietnam are humans and they have the same ways as anybody else and some people are food savers and some aren't. Perhaps this lady was one of those people that like to have a lot of food around. He also admitted that she could have been giving it to the Viet Cong but you couldn't tell one way or the other so why destroy it just on the idea that she might be giving it to the V.C. So he refused and they had another squad come in and take the rice. He tried his best to change the whole policy . . .

If he was so obstinate, how did he get to be a sergeant?

On the way to the battle, he'd be his usual self, griping to the sergeants, but when it actually came to the battle—where it really counts—he'd shrug all this off and he'd be a soldier. One time he was a squad leader and he took over in the middle of the battle. He took it upon himself to take ten men and say, "Follow me, we're going to charge in there." It wasn't his place to do this. It was supposed to be somebody else's job.

Our officers knew this. They knew he was unmilitary but when it came to the battle he was the best one to lead the men. He knew what he was doing. It was like they said, "All right, we're going to make you sergeant and we're going to forget all the things you do when we're not fighting."

Were you ever in situations where there was the killing of Vietnamese civilians?

Yes. I didn't see any of that myself but it went on.

I used the M-79 grenade launcher. That's what Buddy carried too, only later on he switched over to a rifle. We both started out with grenade launchers. We both started out tunnel rats. The grenade launcher was good because—we talked about this—even though people are getting killed by what you're firing it's not a direct thing. It's not a bullet per bullet. You didn't have to put your eye on a particular person and shoot him and kill him. You pulled the trigger and the grenade went out there and blew up. If it hit somebody they got hurt or got killed. He liked that idea—the fact that the grenade launcher didn't kill somebody directly. It would be an indirect thing—he liked that idea.

As a tunnel rat he had the idea which I picked off of him: it's good if you have to be there but don't want to do destructful things and kill. A tunnel rat was good because—you come into a village and everyone else is searching through the village, taking civilians, doing this and doing that, burning hooches. And the only thing you have to do while you're in that village is to go into the tunnels and search them out. It's like everybody else is going around—not

everybody and not all the time—but things are occurring—atrocities—you're down in some hole just searching around and you come up and say, "There's tobacco down there, " or "There's weapons," and you pull them out. So there again you don't have to be really connected in with the terrible things that do happen.

Do you think he ever entertained the idea of rebelling against the whole thing?

No. Here again it's like a lot of things—it's just me and him—things you can feel when you're with the person. He never said it as such, but you could just tell by the way he was that he wouldn't desert. Because he wouldn't be deserting his country, he'd be deserting his friends. He probably thought a thousand times, "I'd like to desert the military, but I can't leave Mike and Joe and Bill and everybody else there." So that's why.

As far as his awards, his medals—the colonels and captains and everyone said, "You did a real good job, over and beyond the call of duty. You saved that guy. You blew up the bunker. It was really terrific." He would say things like, "Well, you can never call saving a friend over and beyond the call of duty. It's what you have to do. You have to make an effort."

I wasn't supposed to see him after his r&r [rest and rehabilitation]. I wasn't scheduled to see him. It was just a freak accident. Now with all the circumstances I can look back on I'd say it was meant to be. I was supposed to bump into him then. It just seemed like circumstances to me at the time.

His father told me that when Buddy left his father said to his brothers, "That's the last time you're going to see your brother alive." And then he took off in a plane.

You can see at the end of the diary he's starting to get scared. He pulls his steel pot down. He's changed from his Ramar of the Jungle hat back to the steel pot and he's pulling it down lower. And he was pulling his flak jacket tighter. Also, after his r&r, he took off the pawn. He got it off his flak jacket because it was all in colors. Up until then it didn't bother him. As a soldier something like that does stand out walking through a green jungle. You're a perfect target. He became more of a soldier. He started working on Noise Discipline. Noise Discipline is keeping quiet at night and no lights—so they don't see or hear you. At nighttime he'd huddle under a poncho to smoke a cigarette, the way you're supposed to do it. He was really nervous.

He said the last three nights of his r&r, he had dreams. He said they were nightmares. He told me this a week or two before he was killed. He said, "Toward the end I really didn't want to go back." And he told me it was really hard getting on the plane. And he threw in a comment about an MP when he was getting on the plane saying, "Hey, trooper, your hair's a little bit too long." And he said, "Forget it, pal, I'm not even going to listen to you."

He said he had these three nightmares. He was walking up a hill. It was green elephant grass. He was the only one there. He was walking by himself. And he said he kept walking and walking and walking. And he just couldn't get out of Vietnam. He was trying to walk out of Vietnam and he said he just couldn't do it. He said, "There I was left. I couldn't get out of Vietnam. For the rest of my life that's where I'll have to stay, just trying to walk." He said he had this dream three nights in a row. This was his premonition of dying.

I told this story to his father and his father said, "That sounds true to me." His father said he was at work one day and he got violently sick. He doubled up. He had to go home he was so sick. And he didn't know what from. And four or five days later he got the death notice. And then he counted back on the calendar and he figured out that the day he was sick was the day that Buddy got killed.

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Bruce also told the story—we stayed up to about six o'clock in the morning one night just talking—and he told me, "Up until now the scenery in Vietnam has been nice. The trees talked to me. And the green. And the winds blow and everything's pretty nice. But since I've been back from there, everything's dead. Everything I look at. No birds. No wind blowing. All the trees look brown and dead."

He said he had a daydream. It wasn't at night. A daydream that he and a Viet Cong were standing on the top of a hill. They were both just looking at the scenery on the top of a mountain, looking out over the land, looking at the other hills and the blue sky and stuff. Buddy was saying to the Viet Cong, "You have a really beautiful country here." And the V.C. said, "Well, thank you. I think it's pretty nice too." He said they both turned around and looked at each other and they both realized that they were enemies. He said, "We shot each other because we were enemies."

And this is the way he talked all throughout these three days. Things like this to go along with the three nightmares he had. He never would have come out and said, "Oh, by the way, I'm going to be killed." That would be too simple. He had to go into these descriptive things.

When I heard he'd gotten killed, the first thing I asked was, "Where was it?" Then it started hitting me. Maybe this was what his dream was all about. And I was told by the lieutenant—he came up to me and said, "Buddy got killed three days ago." And I asked where and how and all this stuff. Now, how reliable he was it's hard to say, but he told me Buddy was going up a hill. He was taking his men up the hill. There was, I believe, a grenade factory. You know, they have their hospitals underground. And grenade factories underground and stuff. On top of this hill in a cave and he was going up there. I asked him if up the hill there was a lot of tall green grass. And he said, "Yeah, I think so." But he couldn't remember for sure. So it kind of fell into place.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What does the expression, "A Pawn in the Game," mean to you? In the game of chess, what is the relationship between the pawn and the other pieces? If Anello was the pawn, who was the king, the queen, the rook and so on?

2. "I hate not these people/I hate not the land . . ." Feeling this way, why did Bruce Anello continue participating in the war?

3. What do you think Bruce would be doing today if he were still alive?

4. Do you know anyone who came back from Vietnam? Did they appear to change? If so, how? How do you think they would react to reading Bruce's diary? What are the vets you know doing now?

A Bummer

We were going single file
Through his rice paddies
And the farmer
Started hitting the lead track
With a rake
He wouldn't stop
The TC went to talk to him
And the farmer
Tried to hit him too
So the tracks went sideways
Side by side
Through the guy's fields
Instead of single file
Hard On, Proud Mary
Bummer, Wallace, Rosemary's Baby
The Rutgers Road Runner
And
Go Get Em—Done Got Em
Went side by side
Through the fields
If you have a farm in Vietnam
And a house in hell
Sell the farm
And go home

—Michael Casey

track: tracked vehicle
TC: track commander

Rick Springman decides that he can no longer fight in a war that he cannot justify. At the same time he believes that he cannot run away from the commitment he has made to the Army. His solution is an individual one: to remain in Vietnam as part of the Army but to lay down his gun and refuse to fight. What can one person do when the demands of a powerful institution conflict with his or her strong beliefs?

Rick Springman

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Rick Springman

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RICK SPRINGMAN

Rick Springman came home in February, 1973, after 33 months as a prisoner of war. One of 566 military prisoners, he got off the plane with his fist clenched in a power salute and a bamboo peace sign hanging from his neck. He is the only GI known to have been captured without a weapon in his hands, gunless in the jungle, because he refused to fight. For a time before his release, the Army classified Sp4 Richard Herald Springman as a deserter.

His Vietnamese captors called him "Ree". . . a ray of sunlight.

We bounced around so much when I was a kid that you might say the place where I really grew up was Vegas. At the Desert Inn, the Dunes, the Fremont, the Tropicana, the Silver Nugget. I was a busboy.

In my sophomore year of high school we were living in Henderson, right outside Vegas, and I started working 40 hours a week, sometimes more, bringing home as much as $200.

We moved to Whittier, California, the next year and I dropped out halfway through the year and started looking for a job.

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from Joe Eszterhas, "The Prisons of War," Rolling Stone, March-April, 1974.

Sooner or later I knew Sam would get me anyway, so I figured I might as well get it over with. My life was going no place. No purpose. No direction. Nothing.

I didn't have any strong feelings about the war. I believed that those dirty communists up North were coming down invading the poor South and my general attitude was to look at political issues and say—"Yeah, right, wow!"

So I quit my job and volunteered for the Army. On March 4, 1969, I was at Fort Ord for my basic . . .

I guess I was somewhat rebellious even then because I couldn't go with their "Spirit of the Bayonet" thing. I wouldn't yell "Blood and Guts! Blood and Guts!" and "Kill! Kill! Kill!" when I was supposed to. If they were watching me, though, I'd move my lips.

They kept trying to inbreed the idea that we'd be better off dead than captured. They told us how the VC put bamboo splinters under your fingernails and put you through different kinds of water torture. They kept saying the VC were gooks. Savages. They were subhuman.

I had 14 days' leave before I went to Nam with my infantry orders. My family took me down to the bus station at six o'clock in the morning. I had to get up to Fort Lewis in Washington and leave for Nam from there. It was a beautiful sunny day in late August and the whole family was there—my granma, my brother Randy. There used to be a lot of distance between Randy and I when we were kids because I was older and always the boss. But that morning we were really brothers. He gave me a cross. It had five sides with different pictures of Jesus and was done in silver.

Shortly after I got there I was assigned to a Night Defense Perimeter on Highway 13. Out on the fringes there was a massive VC ground attack one night. The VC hurled themselves at the concertina wire trying to get in. I went out to the fringe the next morning to see what had happened. Sixty or 70 VC had been stacked up in the wire. Only one of our guys was killed.

Bits and pieces of VC bodies were in the wire. Arms. Legs. Tissues. Skin. They had one big pile of bodies laying there they'd kind of swept together. And some charred bodies that already smelled bad because we'd used some flamethrowers.

A group of our infantry was out there by the wire having a party. Celebrating. Proud of what they'd done. A lot of our guys stood around taking pictures. Souvenirs of the war. You'd hear some of them say things like: "Yeah, I hit him once and I seen his shoulder and his arms fly off and I hit him again and I seen him split in half."

Real early, about sunup, there was a sergeant out there carving one of the bodies up. Just carving, playing with his guts and stuff.

Is this it? I thought. Is this war? Is this Vietnam?

. . . When I was in basic they showed us a movie one night about the military history of America. How we always stood up for what was right and just. How the American soldier was an honorable man. The movie climaxed with Vietnam. How, because of our history of believing in what's right, we had to be in Vietnam. I believed that stuff. It made me feel proud . . .

I started thinking more and more about the war. A lot of guys sat around stoned rapping about the war, some guys had it figured that we had no business in Nam. We heard a few of the Radio Hanoi broadcasts, too. In the villages I'd go out of my way to talk to the kids and people we suspected were VC sympathizers. A lot of what some of these Vietnamese said made

sense: "You're invading our country. You're on our soil. We are not on yours." When I first got there, I thought the Vietnamese loved us because I saw little kids lined up getting C-rations from GIs. But I knew now that wasn't true.

There was a village nearby us that was supposed to be a VC village. The VC were supposedly getting their supplies there and various units had run into sniper fire around there. My CO [commanding officer] was telling the sgt. major that if they burned it down, that would solve 90% of their problems. Then one day there was an "accidental bombing" and the village was napalmed.

The next day I had to go into the village with a unit and saw that two-thirds of it was destroyed. Charred bodies were lying by the side of the road. Women and children. I saw at least two children. I heard from one of the guys that most everybody in the village was killed. Napalm is a jellified gas that burns slowly and also sucks all the oxygen from the area for a period of time. So that if the fire doesn't kill you, you'll choke to death.

Nguyen Hong Tam, burned by an incendiary bomb (such as napalm) in 1965.

I noticed that the CO and the other officers were very quiet about what had happened. I saw the hate in the eyes of the few survivors as we were going through there. I wondered if my dad saw things like that in his war.

When I got assigned to Alpha Company, I realized a lot of my feelings about the war had changed. We escorted convoys and went out on patrols. I wasn't

too concerned before that about what I was doing in Nam, but when I got to Alpha Company I noticed myself doing things—like sometimes I wouldn't fire at the VC when we spotted them. Or I'd fire way over their heads or at their feet. I was concerned about what I was doing with my rounds.

Who I was hitting, who I would be killing, and why.

I kept feeling like life was purposely driving me crazy. One day I was standing around and a trip flare went off accidentally in a box of Claymore mines and my commanding officer and a buddy got killed. They were standing there in front of me and they blew up. A big pop and they were dead. The explosion tore about half their heads off.

After a couple weeks I got transferred to the 25th Infantry Division in Tay Ninh. At that time the area was one of the hottest in Nam. A no man's land. When you flew over it in a chopper [helicopter], it looked like the moon. Craters all over the place.

The unit was totally demoralized. The guys in the 25th were messed up on reds ["downs"]. So messed up they couldn't even fire a weapon. A lot of smack [heroin] and opium was going around, too.

One time a bunch of them ripped through this watermelon patch. They busted through a mamasan's* watermelon patch and she came around the next day holding her busted melons. They didn't even realize what they'd done.

At the end of April I had my R&R [rest and rehabilitation] coming up and I was supposed to go to Hawaii. But I hopped another plane in Honolulu and flew back to Long Beach. It was illegal in the Army's eyes to do that, but I figured after everything I'd seen and gone through that's the least they owed me. To let me get back home for a few days.

I noticed that things had changed. When I was in the States ten months before, people would talk about the war and some of them would call it a bummer, but most people seemed to shuck it off. When I got back this time everybody seemed more serious about it.

I got together a lot with my older brother Bob. We were sitting around the house watching the set one day—I had just a few days left—and I heard that the National Guard had killed four kids at Kent State because they were protesting against the war. I sat in front of the set, stunned, holding my head, trying to make sense of what the hell was happening.

*mamasan: slang used by GI's referring to older Asian women.

I was shocked. I had seen how insane the war was over there and had come back to rest and it was like the insanity was taking over here, too, with kids getting shot. And our big move into Cambodia. I felt the National Guard didn't have any business there in the first place and then when they came out with that stuff about being fired on by a sniper, I could relate to it. I'd heard that kind of excuse given in Vietnam. And of course I could relate to those dead kids because I'd seen people die in Nam.

And I thought—Well, we're killing our own kids here and now I'm supposed to go back into the boonies all rested up and start killing them over there. For what?

A friend of Bob's was involved in draft resistance and getting soldiers to Canada and I talked to him. He was telling me I should forget it, not go back, go to Canada, be free.

But I couldn't do that because it would've been a copout. I mean, I got myself into the Army and it seemed like I had to go back over there and settle this in my own head. It was something between the Army and me and between me and me.

I thought about my own role and about those kids getting gunned down by the Guard and about the things I'd seen over there. I realized I had to stop and look at my own morality and say—Now, really, where's it at, man? And what's the best thing you can do in this situation? And I figured out what I'd do.

I wouldn't carry a gun. I'd never carry a gun again. I would eliminate myself from the conflict. I'd go back to the zone and see my commander and say—"OK, I'm here, but I'm not gonna get involved in your war. I'm not gonna take the chance of shooting anybody."

I'd try to spread it around a little to my friends. If everybody eliminated themselves from the conflict, there would be no more war. I figured they'd probably send me to jail.

I told my mother about what I'd do and she shook her head, gave me a look. My dad didn't say much but I knew a lot of heavy thoughts were shooting through his head. He finally said to me—"Watch yourself. Come on back here in one piece." My dad's a great guy.

Around the 19th of May I was ordered to go into Cambodia with the rest of the invasion force. I asked to see my battalion executive officer. He was

a lifer [professional soldier] in his mid-40's with a high whitewall haircut. I told him I wouldn't carry a gun because of political and philosophical reasons. The way I felt about the war, I said, I couldn't take a human life.

We talked for about a half-hour in his office. He realized he wasn't going to change my mind. He said he could understand my feelings to a certain extent, but I got the impression he thought we were morally right and that's all there was to it.

His general attitude was kind of understanding. He told me to go into Cambodia and try to settle it on the company level. If I couldn't settle it on the company level, he said, he'd settle it. He implied that if my CO gave me any trouble out there about it, he'd instruct him to give me a rear position where I wouldn't have to use a gun in any way.

I told some of my buddies about what I was doing but I didn't get any real support. If you don't have a gun, they said, you'll get killed. Some of them understood why I was doing it, and agreed, but they sure as hell weren't going to do it. "You don't push the Army around like that," they said.

So on the 20th of May I took a chopper into Cambodia. I left my gun behind in the arms room. I just never picked it up after I got back from R&R. The fact that I was walking around without a weapon when I got to Cambodia didn't bother any of the GIs. A lot of guys never carried guns except when they were involved in some kind of action.

I went to see my CO. He was involved in an operation out in the field. Up until then, I kind of liked the guy.

I told him I wouldn't carry a gun. He got a black angry look on his face. He banged his fist on

the little desk he was sitting by and he said—"I don't want to hear any more! Get out of here! Go see the first sergeant! He'll take care of you!"

So I went to see the first sergeant. He was an old guy, a super-lifer wearing ribbons from World War II or something. Wrinkled and with a third of an inch of hair sticking out on top.

Right off he said—"What's this I hear you don't want to carry a gun? And what are you doing out here without a weapon?" He had a really belligerent attitude. His attitude said—"What kind of scum are you coming in here without a weapon? What good are you going to do us out here? I'll fix you up! I'll make sure you do some good!"

From what he said I figured he was going to make me clean weapons and pull dirty details until I changed my mind.

"You'll stay here for two or three weeks," he said, "pull weapons details and KP to earn your C-rations."

I told him I wanted to see the Inspector General, who was 20 miles away in Tay Ninh. *(According to Army regulations, every soldier has the right to take a grievance to the Inspector General.—Ed.)*

"Don't tell me what to do!" he said, "don't tell me how to run my company!"

I said, "I want to see the IG. I know I've got a right to see the IG. I want transportation out of the field." I needed a chopper ride to travel the 20 miles. He shook his head and told me to get the hell out of his office.

So I figured I'd see the Inspector General somehow and started off by foot through the jungle. I was a little nervous about walking 20 miles through the jungle, but I felt clean inside. I knew nobody could make me do a thing in the war any more. I knew nobody could make me kill. I was on a high.

I went waltzing into the jungle, carrying a paper bag with a pound of dope I'd bought in Nam before I choppered into Cambodia. I also had a radio, a lighter, some underwear, some civilian clothes, some beads, a pen, a watch, the cross Randy gave me, and no gun.

The first day I only got 500 yards from the camp. I was staying stoned. I had a joint every two hours. I was trying to figure out what I should do. I was running a bunch of things through my mind, trying to get organized.

I was thinking about spending 60 days in the jungle—all the time I had left in Nam—and then going back to them just before my time was up and saying I'd been captured. And I was thinking about telling them I got caught up in some action and couldn't get through an enemy area back to them. I was trying to figure out some way I could sky out of the country.

The second day I stayed in the same spot. I was thirsty and saw some rainwater puddle up in APC [Armed Personnel Carrier] tracks. I skimmed the surface and tried to drink some clean water.

That afternoon I started gathering sticks and bamboo to make myself a shack. The GIs were only 500 yards away but for some reason I wasn't even afraid they'd spot me. They weren't even on my mind. But they sure got on my mind that night!

I was sitting out there smoking my weed and M-79 rounds started exploding around me. A 79 is a grenade launcher. They hit the tree I was sitting under and the shrapnel blasted the sticks I'd gathered. I figured they were using those heat-sensing devices* back at the camp and the devices had picked me up. The idiots thought I was the VC. They were lowering rounds right on top of me.

*heat-sensing devices: part of the "electronic battlefield," a system of computers and sensors used to locate targets ("people") in remote areas.

On the third day I saw some Cambodians picking mushrooms not far from me. I was hungry and decided I'd get some of those wild mushrooms myself.

One of the Cambodians came up to me and he put his hand up in a peace sign. I put my hand up too. I had some beads around my neck that I'd bought from a Vietnamese mamasan and I gave him some of the beads.

The fifth day I ran into two little Cambodian kids. I'd stopped going towards the mountain. I stayed at the plantation where all the food was at. The kids were picking wild squash and a jungle vegetable that was like spinach. They had a whole bagful of it. I tried to talk to the kids with sign language. Like I'd get two fingers up and one finger would bump the other and that finger would get a little mad, so it nudges the other finger and pretty soon you've got a war going. Then I'd point to myself and point that I didn't have a gun. The kids gave me some vegetables and I gave them some cigarettes.

On the sixth day I walked three or four miles and came to the outskirts of a village, where I spotted some VC tracks. You could tell they were VC from the footprints. Some of them wore plastic sandals and others wore shoes made out of tires. They were easy to spot.

I got into the village about ten in the morning. I waved at all the people. I felt safe. They waved back and were friendly.

I went through the village and on the other side I ate some green fruit about the size of grapefruits. It was puke sour and it made me sick. I needed some water. I had seen a well in the village and I started back.

I was drinking water from the well and I'd taken my boots off and set them down. A young Cambodian guy came up to me and picked the boots up. He was

smiling and waving and he motioned to me to go with him. He took the boots to a hut that belonged to like—the high priest of the village. He set them down outside the hut and went inside. I waited to see what would happen.

I was sitting there when the high priest finally came down and asked with his hands if I was hungry. I said yeah. We were trying to communicate in sign language and we both spoke a little Vietnamese. He was curious about what I was doing there without a gun and I went through my finger-talk again about war.

He fed me pineapple and the kids went out and picked sugar cane. They brought me a clump of straw to lay on and the kids kept bringing more and more sugar cane. Then they brought me a full course dinner, fish and rice.

I was stuffed with all that food and I was comfortable on the straw and I guess I dozed off. Something jerked me awake and I saw there were 15 bayonets around me on AK-47s—VC guns. I got a big rush of adrenaline and my first thought was that they were going to kill me. I flashed on all that stuff in basic about it being better to be dead than captured. That was bull. I didn't want to die.

They were dressed in green, black and blue pajamas. They were businesslike. One of them came out of the group with a rope in his hands. He was going to tie me up. I busted his grip without thinking and I felt a bayonet hit the back of my neck.

"Dip? Dip?" the guy said, which means "You understand?" I felt the bayonet prick the skin a little.

I understood all right and nodded my head.

I told myself that I wanted to stay alive. I knew that if these guys took me prisoner and didn't kill me, the Army would just put me down as a deserter. "Forget the Army," I thought. At least getting captured solved that problem. I wouldn't have the Army to worry about.

They were VC infantry, Cambodian and Vietnamese infantry, about my own age, 18 to 25 years old. They surrounded me, tied my hands and told me to start running. We ran fast for a mile out of the village until we got to a trail in the jungle and then we walked.

They were really happy, like they'd accomplished something great. They sat me down once we got deeper into the jungle and they took all my things. They were like kids in a candy store. They took everything except my weed and the cross Randy gave me. They were acting kind of friendly. I figured they let me keep the weed because they thought I'd need it to get over the shock of what happened.

They were looking all around for my gun and I was trying to explain that I had laid down my weapon. They'd point to their guns and then point to me. I don't think they understood what I was trying to tell them.

After about the first 30 minutes, I knew they weren't going to kill me. Getting captured did solve my problems as far as not being involved in the war was concerned, but it also created another problem because I only had 60 days to go in Nam.

Once they divvied up my stuff, we started on a road march. My hands were still tied, but other than that they didn't hassle me. We'd go through their base camp areas in the jungle. They knew where their bunkers were and they'd stomp their feet three times as they went over them to let other VC know they weren't GIs. They taught me how to stomp my feet. They'd kick the ground three times and then kick me in the shins lightly and make me kick three times.

We marched for about four hours. We got to the camp around midnight. I don't exactly know where it was because they ran me around in circles to get me screwed up. The jungle was so thick you couldn't tell direction by the stars.

The camp was at the end of a small trail beat out through the jungle. Bunkers were dug out and they had trenches built with logs. There were about 25 people there. They sat me down, gave me cigarettes, and fed me pork fat boiled in water.

A woman came over to interrogate me. She was a VC major in her late 30's. She spoke very broken English that I had a hard time understanding.

"Where is your plane?" she asked. "Where is your unit? Where is your gun?"

I told her I had no plane, no unit, no weapon. I tried to tell her in Vietnamese that I had laid my weapon down because I didn't want to kill their people. I was trying to make her understand, though, that I didn't want to kill GIs either.

She gave me a look when I told her that. I could feel a lot of compassion in her eyes. She stopped questioning me after about 15 minutes and they put a chain around my ankles. The chain had large links and a Chinese lock. They put a piece of plastic into a hole in the ground and told me to sleep on that.

The next morning they brought me some rice and little pieces of meat. They took me out of the hole, put me into a bunker, and let me talk to two ARVNs they had captured. I'd never had much use for the ARVN. The times I'd worked with them on an action they weren't worth anything. The times when my unit was on the ground in front of an ARVN support unit, I'd never trust them. Every so often they'd do something like fire on their own people or on GIs.

That afternoon the interpreter came down and he asked—"Do you eat cat?" No way, I said, I don't eat cat. He said: "Okay."

That night they brought me a leg. Well, I looked at it and the interpreter looked at me looking at it and he smiled and said—"Rabbit good. Eat rabbit." I ate it, but I'd bet money it was cat.

They kept me there for a few days, feeding me more cat and some dog. If I were to give you dog in a steak and you didn't know what you were eating, you'd probably think it was beef. Dog tastes good even though it doesn't quite have the texture of beef.

One afternoon the camp commander, a major, came down and told me we were going on a road march. We would be going by American units. "Do not yell out or you will be shot," he said. There were about seven or eight VC with us. They had me tied and the major was right behind me with an automatic in his holster. The holster was unbuckled.

I saw a GI unit about 2000 yards away. I could see their flares. We had to crouch behind foliage as we passed them. I was scared like hell because I figured if their unit was that close, they'd send out some ambushes. I could see getting killed in an American ambush. Later I found out I shouldn't have been worried because the VC always sent out scouts when they moved prisoners.

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The VC amazed me with their knowledge of the jungle. When I used to go out on ambushes with Alpha Company, we would very rarely spot a flashlight. Now I saw why. They kept lanterns over their flashlights. They made the lanterns out of milk and C-ration cans. The light would be blocked so it wouldn't glow. That way they could move around with it easily and not have anybody spot it.

The C-ration cans the GIs threw away were a treasure for them. They used them as bowls to eat out of, as soap dishes, tobacco cans. They were ingenious. They'd even take bomb shells and make combs out of them.

Every so often they gave me a cigarette. Vietnamese roll-your-owns. It's black tobacco. When I first tried to smoke the stuff it was like inhaling orange peels. I could only take little hits.

We got to another jungle camp and they gave me a hammock and a mosquito net. They put two poles in the ground and strung the hammock up. They put a piece of plastic over the top to protect me from the rain and they put a chain around my leg and strung it around the tree.

I couldn't eat the food. They kept bringing eel—the head and the guts. They'd keep the body for themselves. And they brought pig fat and lizard and snake. There were pigs and chickens in the area and each day I'd take the food and when the guard left or looked the other way I'd throw it to the pigs.

The camp commander came down once and questioned me. I told him about not wanting to carry a gun against them, but he didn't really want to hear it. He told me that while I didn't want to kill their people, I would still have supported the American War Effort behind the lines. He considered me an enemy just like all the other GIs. "You will be treated like all prisoners of war," he said.

They finally picked up on the fact that I wasn't eating, probably because I was so wobbly. They came down one day and gave me a shot of this pink stuff. I don't know what it was but they had a big syringe and shot it straight into the vein. That made me feel a little better.

A couple of American choppers came over and fired a few rounds and they figured they had to get me out of there. It was raining, it was the beginning of the monsoon, and I hadn't eaten anything in 15 days. And now I had to go on another road march. They took my things and put them in a pack and lifted it on my back. I collapsed and they lifted me up again. For the first time I thought I was going to die.

The Springmans got the first letter the third of July, 1970.

Department of the Army
Company C
4th Battalion (23rd Infantry)
25th Infantry Division
APO San Francisco, Cal.

Dear Mr. Springman:

On 25 May SP4 Richard H. Springman absented himself without leave from his unit's location in Cambodia. He has been unable to locate (sic) since that date. His squad leader mentioned that on 25 May 1970 SP4 Springman stated he was going to ride the aerial re-supply helicopter back to Tay Ninh, even without authorization. If you have communicate (sic) with SP4 Springman, please advise him it would be in his best interest to return to our unit.

Sincerely yours,
Robert Szabo
1 Lieutenant, Infantry

She replied on July 6th.

Commanding Officer
Company C, 4th Battalion
23rd Infantry, 25th Infantry Division
APO San Francisco, Cal.

Dear Sir:

Enclosed please find an exact copy of a letter I received on July 3, 1970, from the supposedly executive office of your company. It was poorly written, not upon official stationery, and indeed I wonder if it is not some kind of hoax. Our son wrote us once warning us we might receive a hoax letter referring to his being missing in action or dead. And also against phone calls. I am keeping the original in case this should ever be brought up in some kind of proceedings. I am very agitated and deeply concerned about the implication that my son has gone AWOL and indeed I am most anxious to get to the bottom of this matter. As I have not heard from my son for over a month, I was getting pretty worried and was going to write his company anyway and now you see this letter has come to us at a most distressing time. Ricky indicated to us that if anything ever happened to him there would be an official to call on us at home and explain the details. This lieutenant it seems to me has picked a poor way to inform us of our son's disappearance. If I can believe him at all! It seems reasonable enough to me to assume that information of this nature should come through the company commander's office and be written upon official stationery and be verified by the company commander's signature. If my son is missing then I want

a full investigation to rule out all possibility as to his being missing or even killed! Please reply as soon as you can obtain whatever information you must have or I shall have to go to even higher authorities.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Lois Springman

She received the second letter in mid-August, 1970.

Department of the Army
Company C
4th Battalion (23rd Infantry)
25th Infantry Division
APO San Francisco, Cal.

Dear Mrs. Springman:

In reference to your letter postmarked 6 July we'd like to explain the whole matter in greater detail. As far as we know your son has not been located by the Army, nor has he communicated with anyone in his company. According to standard procedure, SP4 Springman has been dropped from the company as of 25 July (30 days after being reported AWOL). A Commander's Inquiry was made of the circumstances of your son's disappearance. On 25 May your son stated to his squad leader that he was going to the rear via helicopter to speak to the Inspector General but he had no permission or authorization to leave the forward area. No one actually saw him get on a helicopter but he was never again seen after he said he was leaving that morning. There is no evidence whatsoever that he was missing in action or that any foul play was involved. The company itself has neither the capabilities or the

responsibility to search for a man who has gone AWOL so we were not able to actively pursue the matter. If you are in contact with your son, it would be in his best interest that you encourage him to turn himself in and terminate his absence as soon as possible.

Terence E. O'Hara
Captain Commanding

Rick

We were heading through a swamp. I was waist-deep in water, trying to keep one foot in front of the other, but I kept falling. And they were picking me up and dragging me by my legs. My head was in the water and every now and then they'd hold me up by the arms so I could cough the water up.

They finally got tired of dragging me. We got to an ant hill and they used it like a mound. They laid me out on top of it. The commander came over and said—"This is a very heavily bombed area. You must move out!" I was about half conscious. He told me to get on my feet and I couldn't. "Under these circumstances," he said, "if you do not move, we will shoot you!" I couldn't move. He left.

A half-hour later he came back with a log and a hammock. They strung the hammock to the log, put me into it, and carried me the rest of the way—six or seven miles. Two guys would carry me a mile and then two others would take over.

When we got to the new camp, they threw me face down into a mudhole. I lay in that mud for a few hours, crying and kicking myself for getting into this. But then I figured circumstances did it. I didn't want to be captured, but I didn't want to be carrying a gun doing Sam's killing, either.

A few hours later they came along with my hammock and things. The guards stood me up, poured water over me, and gave me clean pajamas. They brought some sweet canned milk with rice and it was the first thing I was able to eat. I even had to force myself to eat that, but I was at the point where if I didn't force myself, I knew I'd die. After four days I worked myself up to three meals a day. I couldn't believe they were giving me three meals since in the other places I got one or two.

I asked them if I could write a letter home to my parents to let them know I was alive. They smiled and brought me a pen and paper. I wrote the letter carefully and gave it to them and they promised it would get back to the States. The next day they gave me some cigarettes made with paper that had my handwriting on it. They'd taken my letter and wrapped tobacco in it. I showed the cigarette to a guard and screamed at him. He laughed at me.

They had me isolated, but I could see other POWs there in underground cages. They dug a hole in the ground and put you in it, put bars made out of logs on top with a door on it. They chained the door and they chained you inside your bunker. The bunker was about six-by-eight feet. You could barely stand. You had to stoop down a little bit all the time.

We weren't supposed to talk or communicate in any way, but we'd yell to each other. They were yelling out the names of their units. They asked me where I was captured. The guards would hear us talking and they'd freak. They'd start shaking their rifles at us. I never saw them hit anybody, but I saw them threaten a lot of the guys.

The camp commander came down to the cages and started praising me for laying down my weapon. He called me "Ree," which means sunlight. "Your attitude about the war is like a ray of sunlight," he said. He wanted me to make a tape. I was supposed to say how well I was being treated and how bad the war was. I refused to do the tape because I was angry about getting the letter to my parents back in my cigarettes.

They gave me special privileges. They let me off my chain during the day and I could walk around the camp area. That was my freedom for being a good kid and laying down my gun.

One night they took us out of our cages and said we were going on another forced march, back into Cambodia. There were about a dozen of us prisoners. I didn't know then that we'd be together for more than two years.

Nobody tried any funny stuff. I found out that before I was captured, there was a black guy among them who tried to take off running into the jungle. The guards shot him in the back. So nobody was going to take any chances.

We went through thick jungle terrain and early in the morning got to a place we'd call Monkey Hill. We strung hammocks up and they chained us. We spent more than a month there. We called it Monkey Hill because we ate a lot of monkey there.

They were blue-faced monkeys with hands and fingers, very similar to humanoid. They brought a big pot of boiled monkey down for us. Some of it was raw, red and bloody. We could see heads, eyeballs, brains, parts of the skull, paws.

We ate the monkey because we were starving. And we all got sicker than dogs, came down with ptomaine or something. The place smelled so bad. Barfing up your guts constantly. And they didn't give us any medical care. They looked at us coldly. Their attitude was—"You damn Americans, you deserve to go through this."

There was no command among us, no military discipline. Nothing. Even though we had a major there, he never bothered with trying to be in charge. All of us were against the war and hoped it would end soon. We were always thinking that the war would certainly be over in six months.

We spent most of our time on Monkey Hill rapping. The other guys wanted to know about me. They wanted to know what was happening in the States. How the war was really going. When I told them about laying my weapon down, there wasn't much reaction. Not even from the major. I was doing my thing—that was that. There were some far-out dudes among them.

Bobby Anderson was the only black. He was from Detroit. He'd been a truck driver and his unit had been ambushed in a village. The whole unit was wiped out. He kept to himself a lot and had been good friends with the black guy who'd been shot in the back.

John Bailey was a lawyer from Kansas, a staunch Republican who had a top-secret clearance. He was an adviser and he'd worked with the CIA. He wouldn't even talk to the VC for the first year and a half after his capture. Just name, rank and serial number. I heard he'd really had it rough back then and they were still making it rough on him at Monkey Hill. They'd bring him lousy chow. Not let him take baths. Make him dig holes or cut wood.

Dan Kaminski was a big Polish guy from Chicago. He was a helicopter pilot. On his first flight in Vietnam, his chopper crashed. The second flight he was shot down and captured. He kept calling himself the unluckiest man in the world.

There wasn't anything to do on Monkey Hill except talk and listen to the VC about the war. Like they gave us a bunch of photos of dead kids. Kids who'd been killed by American bombings. They handed out these information pamphlets in English all about the torture tactics the Saigon government was using. They gave us a whole rundown, pictures and details, about My Lai. We all felt My Lai was a terrible tragedy of war. We'd all heard stories like that. Kaminski said he knew a guy that had run down a papasan with an APC because the old man had irritated him somehow. Wheland said he knew some guys who pushed prisoners out of choppers.

One night they moved us out on another road march deeper into Cambodia. We saw a black dude wearing pajamas in the lead party with the VC. He was carrying an AK-47. He was a crossover. One of the guards told us the dude had been in the infantry and had fragged* his commanding officer and switched sides. He had a Vietnamese woman and a kid with him. The VC treated him like he was one of their own. He ignored us, treated us like we weren't there. The guard told us about another crossover who was a legend among the VC. He gave them a lot of intelligence about the Army and took a Vietnamese wife and was living in North Vietnam, teaching villagers about sanitation and building houses. He was supposed to be the greatest fisherman and hunter in North Vietnam.

Then Feldman got a bad case of beriberi and you could hear him moaning all night. His legs got bigger than my waist. He tried to keep his spirits up, but it wasn't easy. They put him on a special diet, gave him meat, and started giving him B-1 shots.

It was strange. When a guy got that sick, the morale among all of us went to hell. Other people started getting sick. The mental attitude got real bad and we knew that the mental attitude was 90% of staying alive. We were constantly trying to think of something good. Something that would give us hope. Trying to talk positive. What we'd do back in the States, how much money we'd get. Up thoughts.

I had a lot of time to think and I guess I learned to like myself in that time more than ever before. Multiple hours on top of multiple hours and nothing to do but think. You really become aware of yourself in that kind of situation and you understand what makes you tick.

I decided I was going to do a tape for them. I was angry at the war still going on, at Nixon, at us being there. I was still angry at the VC about getting the letters back in cigarette paper all the time, but that didn't seem so important any more.

So when they asked me about the tape they'd play on Radio Hanoi, I said fine. I didn't have to lie or anything. I wrote this essay. I wrote about American exploitation of the natural resources in Vietnam and the

*fragged: refers to attacks on officers by their own men, using a fragmentation grenade.

fact that the war was due in large part to the money-people exploiting those resources. That's what the war was about. They took me into a kind of open shack and turned a tape on. Doing the tape was no big thing with the other guys. Practically every prisoner did a tape at one time or another. The guards rewarded me by bringing extra cigarettes and bananas.

We were getting to know some of the guards. We had nicknames for them—Snagglepuss, Goldie, Barbarian, Cyclops, Doofus. Barbarian was always shaking his rifle at someone.

Cyclops was all right. He'd lost one eye in a B-52 raid. He spoke very broken English and he used to talk to us for an hour or so sometimes. About how messed up the Americans were for being there. Considering the fact we shot one of his eyes out, Cyclops was very nice to us.

They moved us about a mile from that spot into these cages they'd built. They'd put four of us into one hole in the ground and put cages around the holes. Then they had us build granite bunkers so we'd be protected from shelling.

That hurt a lot mentally. It seemed so permanent. It looked like we were moving in for good, like building a house.

The only time we got a little up was when they brought the radio down and let us listen to Radio Hanoi. We heard about the McGovern-Hatfield Bill* and hoped maybe that would end the war.

We had just finished eating lunch one day and I lit a cigarette off another guy's butt that was already burning. That was a no-no. Because you were supposed to ask the guard every time you wanted to light a cigarette. The guard started screaming at me

*McGovern—Hatfield Bill: legislation in the Congress to cut off funding for the Vietnam war.

and yelling for me to get in my cage. I got into the cage and I guess I didn't move fast enough because he slammed the door on my foot. It hurt like hell and I flicked the cigarette butt at him. After that they kept me on a chain all the time. No special privileges for old Ree.

It might sound funny, but we looked forward to Christmas coming. The other guys told me that the Christmas before they'd actually brought them boiled chicken. They said it tasted almost like stateside chicken. This Christmas they brought us a big pan of water buffalo with about 30 bite-sized pieces in it, poured over rice. That was a super-steak dinner to us. We tried not to think about turkey and what our families were doing.

The camp commander gave a speech for us—"Due to the humane treatment policy of the National Front for Liberation, we are giving you this meal and wishing you a very merry Christmas. We hope that by next Christmas your country will realize its mistake and end the oppression of our people."

"Far out," we said, "bring on more food." They did, too. They gave us two or three candy balls apiece and a quart of tea.

I passed my weed around and we smoked the last of it. All my dope was gone and, man, that really scared me! I talked to the camp commander and asked him if instead of giving me cigarettes, they would give me weed. "You smoke tobacco or you smoke nothing!" he said.

Then the dry season came and that was almost unbearable. It was dusty. You'd get but one quart of water a day and that was for brushing your teeth, drinking, washing. You'd go 12 or 14 days without a bath. Your skin would get dry and crinkly and it would crack and break. You'd have a split lip all the time. And you stunk. We all stunk.

Lois, Rick's mother

Oh, God, where is he? That's all we kept thinking about. We wouldn't let ourselves think that he'd been killed without his dogtags. That nobody would ever find his body. We thought that if we believed he'd make it, that would help him come back home.

Rumors were going around that a bunch of guys who didn't want to fight in the war had left their companies and had gotten together and were living in the jungle. We hoped maybe Ricky had joined up with them.

We didn't know where he was and what was happening to him and nobody would help us. One day I called the Red Cross and told them he was missing and begged them to help me try to find out something. They said they would.

But when they called back their attitude had changed. "The only thing we can find out is that your son has been dropped as a deserter from his unit," they said. "There's nothing more we can do." From their tone what they were telling me was—"Your son is rotten and we don't want to be bothered with him."

Another time I called the Pentagon and begged them to help, but they kept putting me on hold and switching me around to various offices. Some sergeant finally talked to me and with a snicker in his voice said—"Our information says your son is a deserter and there's nothing more we can do."

Sometimes not knowing anything drove me hysterical. I just wanted to hear something. Anything at all. Sometimes I'd go into the bedroom and cry and cry and not be able to pull myself out of it. And sometimes I wished that I was dead because then I wouldn't have had to put up with the pain and the worry. And the nightmares.

I kept dreaming that I was asleep in an old castle. Suddenly I would wake up in the dream and hear a noise downstairs and I'd wonder—Now who can that be at this hour? There was a winding staircase and I'd start walking down it and hear sobbing. Somebody was crawling up the stairs. And suddenly I knew it was Ricky.

I'd start running down the stairs and Ricky was lying there screaming—"Mother, I'm blind, I'm blind." I'd turn him over and his eyes were staring and vacant and he was bloody and messed up.

I'd wake up from the dream and go into the bathroom and still hear him calling—"Mother, Mother, help me!"

Rick

We were in the cage bunkers about five months and then American bombers started hitting us again. They must have spotted the bunkers. Choppers started coming over and one night they hit the camp with gas and made some runs on the bunkers.

We were scared to death. Our own guys seemed determined to blow us away. We were so mad that I think if the guards would have given us guns, any one of us would have tried to shoot those choppers down.

The guards would come up after a bombing or a run and laugh at us and say—"Now you know how we feel."

They were planning to move us out of there so we wouldn't get killed when I caught malaria. You get the super-chills and you lay there and shake hard enough that you practically shake the whole bunker. Then all of a sudden you stop shaking and break out in a fantastic sweat. Water comes pouring out of you. Then you lie there hot, sticky and smelly for a while and then the chills start again.

I was really weak and we had to walk to the new cages. I hadn't eaten for about a week and I was stumbling, falling down. I couldn't keep on my feet. And they'd drag me by the hair. Being dragged was worse than walking so after about a mile of being dragged I'd get to my feet again. But they'd have to drive the pain in me enough for me to concentrate all my effort and energy into forcing myself to walk again.

Around two o'clock in the afternoon we heard a terrible roar in the sky—B-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!—and the guards started screaming "Ba-Nam-Hi! Ba-Nam-Hi!"... B-52s overhead! Everybody started running around for cover.

Nothing ever scared me while I was a prisoner like the B-52s. When the bombs came through the air they made a horrifying sound, the spinning and air motion created an endless whoooooooooooooo! It was like a high-pitched witch's voice, loud and eerie.

When the bombs were falling, you had to start screaming to get air going through you because they sucked the air up. You wanted your mouth open, your nose open, your ears open. So you screamed. You yowled. You went ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh! at the top of your lungs. Then you were banging and shaking around in the bunker because of the concussion. If it hit a hundred yards away, it picked you up like a tornado and tossed you. Staying alive depended on how far away the bombs hit. You were powerless to do anything about it.

First the roar, then that eerie sound, then the explosions and screams. Some guys started screaming already when they heard the roar out of reflex.

And if the B-52s got too close, like ten yards away, you were a goner. Before I got captured our company passed through the edge of a village that had been hit by B-52s. The village had been reduced to craters 30 feet deep, 40 feet across. I kept flashing back on those craters as the B-52s were hitting us.

A flight of B—52 bombers drops 1,000— and 750—pound bombs over Vietnam.

We were really sweating it because the B-52s were hitting closer and closer. The next morning they came again. This time they almost got us. They hit a couple hundred yards away. We were getting thrown into the air inside the bunkers and we heard the shrapnel ricocheting around, whistling overhead. Everything was crashing all over the place. Trees were flying through the air. It was too much. The screaming and the explosions and everything flying around. I couldn't hold my hands straight afterwards they shook so much. With some guys, their minds snapped. You'd have to hit them and shake them and pour water on them. Their nerves were shot.

They moved us farther into the jungle right after that into a bunker-camp area. We left Sommers behind at the dugouts because he had a bad case of malaria. In August we found out they'd released him.

We couldn't believe it. We found out they took him to a main trail and gave him a Vietnamese flag and an official document from the National Liberation Front and he walked out by himself. It didn't make any sense. Sommers had tried to escape twice and he was a general smart-alec and they'd let him go!

We celebrated our second Christmas there. They brought us tea and peanut candy and tailor-made cigarettes. They let us get together for half an hour at a table and talk. We talked about the turkey dinner they must be having at home and the Christmas tree. Wow! Wouldn't it be great to be sitting by the tree looking at all those lights! Bright beautiful lights all different colors! We never saw real colors in the jungle. Every time we saw wild flowers, we stopped to pick them up just to have colors.

We gave each other presents. Soap dishes and bags, little cups, bowls we'd carved out of rocks with fishbones. Kaminski gave me a peace symbol he made out of bamboo. I loved that peace symbol. It was the nicest gift I'd ever gotten.

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Kaminski could whistle like you never heard anybody whistle and we spent Christmas night sitting in our cages singing "Jingle Bells" and "Silent Night" as Kaminski whistled away.

Vern, Rick's father

One day two Army guys showed up at the door and said they'd come down from Washington, D.C., to talk to us. A couple of our kids were there and they said the kids would have to leave the house before they'd talk. The kids left and Lois said—"Well, is it good news?" And then they made her show them her driver's license and they made me show my driver's license and one of them finally said—"Well, I guess you could say it's good news."

This Sommers who'd been released told them Rick was a prisoner. Right away they said we couldn't tell anybody Rick was a prisoner and that we couldn't talk to any newsmen. They said they wouldn't even change Rick's status from "missing" to "captured" because then the VC would find out that Sommers had told them.

They didn't want the VC to find out because they said they were afraid they'd hurt the other prisoners. That didn't make any sense to me. I figured that they wanted to keep the parents of POWs simmered down and not talking about the damn war.

We were happy that we knew he was officially alive, although we even had reason to worry about that. The Army guys kept saying—"As of August 15th we know he was alive." But this was September already and there was nothing that said he hadn't been killed in the month's time. It scared us that he was a VC prisoner because we'd heard stories that VC prisoners were being starved and hauled around in cages.

They assigned us a family assistance officer from the Pentagon. He was some kind of an intelligence officer and he'd come down now and then to make

sure we weren't blowing our cool about the war, pat us on the head. He kept saying how much he believed in the Army and believed in the war. When we asked him about Rick being considered AWOL he'd say—"I don't think anything will happen to him because of it. Regardless of how he disappeared, the price he's paying is enough."

Lois and I went down to a meeting of POW parents in Los Angeles once. They had a flock of big brass there and each of them got up and kicked a little pitch about how the war would end soon and our boys would be released. They told us how they'd have a lot of problems even once they got back. They'd have 20-25% weight loss, malaria, worms, be messed up psychologically. They wouldn't be able to make decisions for themselves because they'd been told for so long what to do. "When he comes back," they said to us, "if you have vanilla and chocolate ice cream, don't ask him which one he wants. Give him one because he won't be able to make the decision."

The trouble with all of that thinking was that the damn war didn't seem like it was going to end. Nixon just kept it up.

Just before Christmas two Army guys brought us a little plaque. It said—"Happy Holiday Season. The United States Army honors the gallant families of the brave Americans captured and missing in Southeast Asia. May courage sustain you and faith enrich you during this sacred time of year. God be with you." It was signed by General Creighton Abrams, commander of all Army personnel in Vietnam. Lois looked at that thing and at those Army guys and said she felt like hitting them over the head with it.

And if that wasn't enough, a few days later we got a Christmas card from Nixon. Here's this card from Nixon and at the same time he's bombing hell out of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. And there was no telling if Rick was under any of those bombs.

Rick

About March of '72 they told us they were launching a big offensive that would win them the war. It was going to be total victory for the National Liberation Front. We didn't feel there'd ever be any type of military victory in that country, but we went along with them. "Great," we said, "then we can go home."

They overran firebase Cam Maryann, not too far away from us, and killed a lot of ARVN and some GIs. They overran another support base in the area and things started getting hot again. Some Cobras [helicopter gunships] came in on the camp with rockets one night and the next day they told us we were moving out.

This was going to be the all-time Great March: We'd be moved north into Laos. It was well over a hundred miles away. We were supposed to cover 12 miles a day.

We started out each day when it got dark and marched till dawn. We had nothing to eat but rice balls and salt. Our blisters got so bad there were big holes in our feet and we had to wrap them up in rags.

One night they put us in a truck. The VC really knew that jungle. We'd roar down narrow trails at 40 or 50 miles an hour without lights, barely missing trees. The area we were going through looked like it'd been shelled. Twenty or 25 burned-out tracks and tanks. We also saw an elephant some VC were using to drag logs.

We stopped at a barn and found out we'd start marching again the next day. Wheland was barely conscious and wouldn't eat. We knew if he didn't eat he'd die. We decided to force some food down his throat. Some of the guys thought—"Why go through this? If he doesn't want to eat, forget him!"

National Liberation Front forces marching at night.

We got into the area that was going to be our camp for a while the next day. Major Stokes came in two hours after the rest of us. His legs gave out on him and he had to take baby steps the last couple miles. His guards took baby steps along with him.

We were somewhere in the southern tip of Laos. The guards told us we'd have to build our own camp and our own cages. Thick bamboo lay all over the place and the terrain was hilly in spots. It kept raining and raining.

We started building. Digging trenches. Laying logs. Building these cages with little sticks and logs. Wheland looked at the cages and said—"They treat you like birds, feed you like birds. Now we gotta build damn dinky bird cages." So we called the place the Bird Cages from then on.

The Bird Cages were living hell. Two-foot-long viper snakes crawled all over. They were known as "two-step snakes." They got you and you took two steps and died. If you saw somebody get hit by a viper, the only way to save him would be to take a machete and chop the arm or leg off the guy before a minute had passed. I was sitting on a log one day and a viper came out under my legs. I froze, but it kept going for some reason and left me alone.

We got a lot of boiled rat to eat. Not the body, which we'd eaten before, but ratskulls. Eyeballs, jawbones, brains. It was stringy, mushy and putrid, but we ate it. The rice we got came from a 20-year-old French cache. It was green and moldy with worms and black bugs in it. At first I tried to pick the bugs out of it but that was impossible. So I just ate the bugs too and hoped it was protein or something.

They brought in a new crew of guards and the new ones hated us. No talking to each other, ask permission for everything. They had a cute trick of taking you out into the jungle all by yourself if you did something wrong and leaving you there. A guard was nearby to make sure you kept standing all the time—for seven or eight hours.

And sometimes they'd fool you and make you believe you'd be released. They'd separate you and give you good food and imply with their attitude or with little comments that you'd be released soon. It'd keep up for a day maybe or ten days. Then it'd be back to the ratskulls.

They were trying to make it as hellish as possible. A few of us started talking about trying to escape, but most of the guys didn't even want to hear it—no matter how bad it was. Their attitude was—"I'm not about to get myself killed now after all this that I've gone through. I've survived and I'm not about to chance losing it all now. I'm going to make it back home."

The guards came in and said we'd spend the day making punji-stakes. They had the material with them. No way, we said, we aren't going to do it.

Punji-stakes are weapons. You take bamboo sticks and sharpen the ends of them. You dip them into urine and let them dry out and get brittle. You stick them into the ground and whoever steps on them gets poisoned.

Major Stokes said he wasn't going to make any weapons that were going to hurt or kill other GIs. I said I wasn't going to make a weapon supporting the war effort for either side. I said I'd laid down my gun so I wouldn't hurt their side and I wasn't going to do anything now to hurt our side, either.

. . . When I was with Alpha Company, I was working a unit that was setting up mousetraps. They were little traps attached to a blasting cap. The VC would step on them in the jungle and the traps would blow the VC to smithereens. Spread their bodies around in the treetops. The unit was doing a good job with those mousetraps, averaging 200 kills a month . . .

The guards said there were a lot of spies and agents in the area and the punji-stakes would be for our own protection. "But setting those stakes up around the camp would help keep us in," we said. They answered—"All security measures are for your protection."

Some of the guys weren't too strong about it in the beginning, but when some of us started saying —"They can't make me do it!" then all the guys picked it up and said—"Hell, they can't make me do it, either." That way we got unanimous agreement.

The guards got flustered and went to the commander. They came back after a while and said we wouldn't get any food until we agreed to make the stakes. This was during a tense time anyway. Relations between the guards and prisoners were worse than ever before. So we didn't get any food that night and we didn't get breakfast the next morning.

The interpreter came down at lunch the next day and said—"Whoever of you wishes to make punji-stakes shall eat." Nobody answered. So nobody ate. This went on for another day. The interpreter kept asking and nobody answered.

But then some of the guys started saying they were sick and were going to have to eat. Wheland said—"You know how screwed up I am. I can't go without eating much longer. If I have to make punji-stakes or whatever I have to do to keep myself alive, I'm going to do it."

So Wheland gave in and Hector Cruz, who had malaria, gave in too. What really made me angry, though, was that other guys started giving in. Jesus, who was all right, and Bobby Anderson. There was nothing wrong with either of them.

Then, gradually, almost all the other guys gave in and started eating, even John Bailey, our Republican conservative.

The guards played it smart. They'd bring supermassive amounts of food to the people who were eating and make those few of us who still refused watch them gobble. And the guys who were eating could take baths and get their medicine. Those of us who refused to make the stakes were starting to smell and we were getting weak from missing our medication.

The guards would come down to us each day with big plates of food.

"Would you like to make punji-stakes?" they'd ask.

"No punji-stakes."

"We have very good food for you tonight."

"No stakes."

"We bring bananas for you to go with your rice. Help you eat. You will not make punji-stakes?"

"No punji-stakes."

After nine days, when we were so weak we could hardly walk, the major said we couldn't carry it any further. We were getting too weak. He said he'd make a deal with the commander. So he went to the commander and said he'd make the stakes for everybody if the rest of us didn't have to make them. The commander agreed.

One morning they brought the punji-stakes down, the bamboo and the urine. They handed the major a machete. He went up to the bamboo and started cutting and sharpening the stakes. The guards watched for a while and then one of them took the machete away from the major. The guard had a smile on his face.

"You agree to make the stakes," he said.

We figured out that they didn't actually want us to *make* the stakes. They just wanted us to *agree* to make them. Playing games with us.

Nobody liked Nixon. The guards gave us copies of the Ellsberg papers* and that made us realize how the whole scheme began with Eisenhower. We figured after that the American people would have to be insane

*Ellsberg papers: Daniel Ellsberg was a government employee who released documents in 1971 which revealed information about the war previously kept secret. These government documents, published as "The Pentagon Papers," contradicted the information that the government had given to the American public.

to vote for Nixon. We figured he was carrying on the war for the natural resources in Vietnam and for our investments there. Not solely for his personal gain but for the gain of his cult, the fat cats. I had no trust in the man at all.

We were hearing propaganda stuff from Radio Hanoi that gave us hope. McGovern got a standing ovation from so many thousand people in such-and-such a place. He'd win it hands down. People were hip to Nixon. People were waking up, getting on the ball. The country was changing.

Bailey was the only guy who kept saying—"Don't count your chickens before they hatch." But even he thought McGovern would win.

I bet Bailey that McGovern would win by a landslide. Bailey agreed he'd win but said it'd be close.

We counted the days before the election. We knew the exact day. We'd sit around and twirl our thumbs, not talk as much. If you heard somebody say something, you'd hear—"McGovern better win!"

The guards said—"It matters not who will win, we will surely defeat your army."

Election Day passed and we didn't know who'd won. The guards wouldn't tell us. We were going crazy. There were a lot of hassles, tensions. Three days later we were listening to the radio. We heard the words—"The president." At the same time the camp commander showed up and said—"Mr. Nixon has been elected again to be your president."
It blew us out! Nixon by a landslide! Four more years! It completely destroyed my frame of mind and everybody else's. We had to accept the fact that Nixon was still the president and that the country was more messed up than we thought. We couldn't believe how stupid the American people were. We were down on the whole country.

The day before we found out, we were all in pretty good shape. But the day after the commander came down, everybody got sick. Six people had malaria and two or three people started swelling up with beriberi. Unbelievable rashes were breaking out—open sores, yellow, green, orange.

They brought a Cambodian doctor into the camp and he put Bailey and I on intravenous. They gave us milk, oranges, bananas, quinine. Started pumping us with vitamins.

We figured that we'd stay prisoners until we were old men with white hair.

... We started hearing on Radio Hanoi about secret meetings that were taking place between Kissinger [Secretary of State] and the North. We didn't want to get our hopes up because we were afraid we'd get sick again like after Nixon won.

And we thought Kissinger was no good anyway. Because of the way he'd helped smooth public opinion during critical times in the past. And as far as we were concerned, public opinion was the only thing that could end the war.

Early in January weird things started happening. We kept hearing about secret negotiations and the guards started feeding us up. Bringing us purple sweet potatoes, lots of pork and vegetables. We got good tobacco, enough toothpaste to brush twice a day, towels. They even brought us new pajamas and a guy came in with a tape measure to fit us.

The guards wouldn't be specific about anything, but once in a while one of them would say something like—"We feel the war may be over soon." We put everything together and it added up, but we were still afraid to think we'd be released. Hanoi was still down on Kissinger over the radio, saying he was trying to drag out everything.

Then one day they told us we could write a ten-line letter home. This time it didn't seem like a lie because they showed us a diagram of the kind of letter they wanted us to write. The heading was "A prisoner of war from the National Front for Liberation."

They gave us haircuts and a real shave with a razor. Before that they'd just used the clippers to skip the main part of our beards off, but this time they used razors. Those razors were a heavy clue.

They moved us about a mile to another camp and brought us together with nine other prisoners. One of the guys there had been a prisoner for seven years. They were a rowdy bunch, a lot of them still gung ho, still hating the Vietnamese. They said things like—"The only good gook is a dead gook."

We noticed the guards were easing up a bit. They kept a close eye on us, but didn't harass or

punish us for little things. When they saw us talking, some of them looked the other way. By this time, too, our diet was great. Meat and vegetables once a day, decent rice.

Of course we knew that no matter what happened we could still get killed any minute, that the jungle still wanted to kill us. I was carrying logs down a trail with some of the others and we heard sounds in the jungle, sticks breaking and crackling. It was a python. It hit the trail about 50 feet in front of us. Dark green, about 14 feet long, thicker than my waist, the header bigger than mine. We froze and watched it slither into the bush.

One day the camp commander came down and said—"I have something of great importance to tell you. It seems at last your country has decided to sign the document." He said the signing of the treaty was only two days away.

Man, those two days were full of tension. Some guys still said it was phoney. That they'd get down to the table and Kissinger would refuse to sign. Somebody said—"I can dig on it anyhow because we're getting all this good chow."

Two days later, around six o'clock at night, when we'd just finished eating, we heard 15 or 20 guards running down the trail laughing and shouting. "The war is over!" one of them said, "the document has been signed! You are all going home!"

A big roar filled the camp. We were jumping up and down, yelling and screaming, hugging and shaking on each other, leaping up on each others' backs.

We didn't sleep at all that night. Stayed up whooping and jiving.

The guards brought us chocolate peanut candy, raw cocoa, and then partied hard all night themselves. All the VC in camp held a meeting. A speaker was

up there and all the VC listened without making a sound. The speaker would stop and the audience would clap twice. Just twice, no more. Clap, clap. Even their celebrations were militarily organized.

The camp commander told us officially that since the treaty had been signed our chains would be taken off during the day. We'd be allowed to have our supper meal together. We didn't have to ask permission to go to the john or smoke any more.

But after they took the chains off you could tell the guards began to resent it. I think they resented the fact we were happy and had some freedom. And maybe they were thinking about us going back to the States and living well and them staying in the jungle.

A political officer came to camp and talked to us about our captivity. He was an older, well-fed Vietnamese who spoke perfect English.

First he talked to us in a group and asked us our feelings about our captivity. I told him I felt I'd been treated unfairly because I was captured after I refused to carry a gun.

"Unjust things happen in war," the political officer said.

He came to me afterwards and said—"We understand, Ree, that you were a very good man and that you did not want to kill our people. But we also understand that you would have supported the American War effort in the rear."

He asked us how we felt about the Vietnamese people. Some prisoners laughed sarcastically and I heard one guy say—"Gooks!" But some of us said we felt we understood the Vietnamese people better after our captivity. That we understood now about the struggles of their people and the problems of their country.

The political officer said that one day there would be a final revolution. That one day the whole world

would live under one form of government. "Some of you will hate us," he said. "Some of you will go back and have bad things to say about us. Others of you are our brothers and will stand by our side during the final revolution."

In the next few days they held a couple lectures about the history of their country and the great victory the National Liberation Front had won. The guys laughed a lot when they heard that. Wore big grins.

I was getting worried about what the Army would do to me. Like I knew they had for sure put me down as having gone AWOL and I knew that after a guy's absent for 30 days they put him down as a deserter. I knew they couldn't prove anything. I didn't intend to go back. I figured my best chance would be to find a chaplain as soon as I got back and have myself declared a conscientious objector. That would make it a little easier.

It seemed like I was just getting out of one big problem, getting out of VC captivity, and I was heading right into another one—the Army hassling me. I hoped that they wouldn't do anything crazy like try to put me in jail for laying my gun down. But I didn't know what they'd do because Nixon had won the election and I was thinking maybe the whole country had gone nuts.

The VC brought a group of photographers into camp and started staging all these phoney pictures. We were wearing brand-new, tailor-made green pajamas and plastic sandals so we'd look nice. They lined us up one day with the photographers there and had us walk up to a VC general and shake his hand. That was something I'd never seen before—VC shaking an American's hand.

One night they told us we'd be released the next day. Nobody slept. There was incredible excitement. It was February 14th, 1973.

We were rolling toward the strip. Almost home. The truck went through the village and the villagers stood on the sides of the road and waved. No animosity. No sarcasm. The way it should be when a war is over.

We saw the American choppers there. The pilots even had the blades going. Walk up to them and get on and you're home free. That's what we thought.

There were six or seven hundred ARVN prisoners sitting there in a group. They'd all been captured by the VC. We were told by a guard that while the helicopters were there to take us home, we couldn't go until the ARVN released a bunch of VC prisoners. The ARVN transport with the VC aboard hadn't arrived yet. So we'd have to wait.

The airstrip was jammed with big shots. Chinese officers, VC political officers, ARVN wigs, a full-bird colonel. Reporters from all over the place. The reporters were asking us a million silly questions so fast we couldn't even understand them.

I went over and talked to a couple of Red Chinese political people. I told them the truth. That, under the circumstances, I'd been treated fairly. That I had no animosity against the Vietnamese people. They smiled and we shook hands.

We got the word that they were ready to load us and we started walking toward the choppers. Each step was like a thousand miles.

The chopper pilot shook my hand and said—"It was a helluva haul, but you're out of it now." He gave me a Pepsi. That Pepsi was home. I didn't believe I was free until I took my last step. Up and into the chopper. Home free.

We didn't say very much to the pilots. You couldn't hear very well in there and we were so spaced, so flabbergasted by what was happening to us, that we probably couldn't have said anything that made any

sense anyway. We were flashing through the darkness with those lights and after a while we could see Saigon down there. Lights. Beautiful lights all under us. Even Saigon looked beautiful to me right then. They walked us off the chopper and straight over to an airplane headed for the Philippines.

The plane was a civilian job with a military crew. Plainclothes guys were keeping an eye on us—somebody said they were CIA.* We had female officers for stewardesses. We loved seeing those women—American women—though nobody made any moves on them. We had our muddy pajamas on and some of us smelled pretty funky too. And some of the guys were so broken up they were crying.

I had the bamboo peace symbol around my neck that Kaminski gave me for Christmas in the camp. I was the only one wearing anything like that. I noticed some of the other guys staring, but nobody said anything about it. I figured that if somebody else didn't like what I wore, that was their problem. The peace symbol was important to me. As a symbol of the mistake that we made in Vietnam and as a symbol of hope for better things to come. The flight to Clark Air Force Base took about six hours and when I got off with my peace symbol around my neck I lifted my hand in the power fist. Thousands of people were waiting for us, cheering.

A whole row of high-ranking generals was waiting for us at the airport. We had to go down the line and shake hands with them and at the end of the line they had the flag set up. We were supposed to walk up to the colors and salute. Nobody saluted. Not one of us. I could see some of the officers whispering to each other. The reason nobody saluted was that we were so excited to be free we didn't think about the flag.

*CIA: agents of the Central Intelligence Agency.

They piled us onto a bus and took off for the hospital. Philippine people were lined up all along the sidewalks. The bus had to stop for traffic a few times and once when it stopped a girl came running up to it. She had long dark shiny hair. I thought she was the most beautiful girl in the world. She ran up to my window with a bouquet of yellow and purple wild flowers and gave it to me. That made me feel so good I almost started crying.

When we got to the hospital they had robes and towels ready. We threw our pajamas away and climbed into hot showers. I loved that hot shower so much I must have been in there for an hour. They took us down to the mess hall and fed us roast beef and turkey. I noticed that some guys were still crying off and on.

The next day they put us through a million tests. Electrocardiograms, dental exams, everything. One guy had gangrene and they told him they'd have to take his foot off. I had a big blister on one foot that looked like gangrene but they told me they could clear it up with shots. Most of us had mild cases of beriberi, weak kidneys, vitamin deficiences. Both my eyesight and hearing were bad. I had infections of the bladder and prostate. We were told we'd stay there for three days and wing on to Hawaii.

I called home. The conversation was unreal. We couldn't really say anything to each other because the minute I said something, they said something too. We were talking at the same time. I thought there would be all these tears over the phone, but there weren't. They didn't cry. I figured that with all the worrying they'd done, they were probably all cried out by then.

On the morning of the fourth day they had us dress up in our nice shiny new uniforms with all the medals on them and took us out to the airport. We

were heading for Hawaii. I noticed my escort officer getting up all the time to talk to a colonel in charge and didn't find out till afterwards what was going on.

I'd freaked them out. I was wearing my bamboo peace symbol over my medals and uniform and the colonel didn't know whether they could let me get off the plane like that. They were trying to raise General Abram's office before the plane landed to find out whether I could wear it. About three minutes before we landed the colonel was told that it was OK.

So I got off the plane all decked out in my uniform and medals and ribbons and my bamboo peace symbol. There were crowds of people down there. Photographers. Flower girls even. When I stepped off the plane I put my hand up and gave the world the power fist again. I wanted the whole world to see where this GI was at.

We were only in Hawaii for a few hours and took off again for Travis Air Force Base. From there on I was going to go to the hospital at the Presidio of San Francisco. I slept most of the way and woke up as we were landing. When the plane got over the States, there was a big cheer and everybody pushed up to the windows to look down at the cars and homes. It felt great being back, but looking down from the plane it didn't seem like much had changed.

I got off at Travis with my peace symbol still around my neck and made the power fist again. The brass had some of the other prisoners make speeches. "God Bless America and God Bless Richard Nixon," they said. They didn't ask me to give any speeches but if they would have, I wouldn't have said that. I would have said—"I hope the American people have learned something from this war."

Bob, Carol, Rick, Lois and Vern Springman

They drove me to the hospital and the next day my parents came in. We cried and held each other. I grabbed my brother, Randy, and kicked him. He was back from the Army in Germany. I looked at my family and saw the years. My mom and dad looked a lot older and the difference in my sister Carol was terrific. I last saw her when she was 12 and now she was 15 and there was an awful lot of difference there.

We had lobster dinner on the top floor with a view overlooking the whole city. I ate 22 bowls of ice cream for dessert—strawberry, vanilla, chocolate, whatever they had.

My sister was taking pictures and some of the guards went up to her and demanded her film. Well, that was too much! She wouldn't give them the pictures. "He's my brother and they're my pictures," she said. They got some brass down there and told her they didn't want any pictures of me getting out

because "they would jeopardize the other prisoners still in Vietnam."

"We've got to have that film," they told her. "We can't let that film get out of this building."

The next day I talked to a chaplain and told him I wanted to become a conscientious objector. I told him I didn't feel like I had the right to take another life. He asked me what I'd do if my family was attacked and I told him I would shoot to wound. I filled out a CO form and he filled out a report and said he'd let me know.

Two CIA guys came in and filled my room up with maps. They wanted to know everything that had happened to me. They wanted to know why I'd gone AWOL and I told them about laying my weapon down because I didn't want to kill anyone.

Two days later I was notified that I had been granted conscientious-objector status and right after that I got a form letter from the Army saying that the charges against me had been dismissed. The charge was being absent without leave. They'd never charged me with desertion. I felt safe—at home—for the first time since I'd been captured, knowing the Army wasn't going to try to put me back in jail after being a prisoner for three years.

The Army put me on tranquilizers. They told me the tranquilizers would help me to adjust, but I figured they were afraid I'd go to the press and start talking about the war and how I didn't want to fight the VC. I had the feeling they considered me a radical. Some of the brass kept eyeing the peace symbol.

About a month later they told me I was free to go home. They told me I should keep taking the tranquilizers because I'd have trouble adjusting. I told them I didn't want any more, that the only trouble I had adjusting came from the tranquilizers.

It was time to go home. I was happy about that but it also made me think. For three years the VC were always telling me what to do and the Army was always telling me what to do when I got back . . . and now it was up to me. Nobody would tell me anything. I was on my own.

One of the first things I wanted to do was get inside my brothers, rap and communicate and dig on them as brothers. And help them, too, because they were having hassles with their own lives.

The Army gave me about $40,000 in back pay and I used it to buy land and property. I bought the house in Cottonwood for my parents and a house in Huntington Beach in California and some land in Oregon and Nevada.

I don't exactly know what I want to do, except be left alone for a while. At first I thought about going back to school, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized life is more of a school than the technicalities they'd teach me in some classroom.

I've thought about doing a lot of things. Raising cattle. Running coffee from South America to Europe. Learning carpentry and working with my hands.

I suppose when I think seriously about it I see myself in Cottonwood in 20 years with a house and a wife and kids. I like kids and I'd like to have kids but I would teach my kids to think for themselves all the time, be themselves, not be what others want them to be.

When I first got home, I got a lot of letters from people all over the country saying they were happy I was all right. And I kept getting calls from girls around here that I didn't even know. The operators all knew me and they'd say—"Hi, honey" when I got on the line. We got three hate letters too, all unsigned. One guy had clipped out my picture in the paper with the power salute and he wrote—"You should have been killed over there."

After a while things leveled off and I could relax and get into being home. My brothers and I decided that we were going to build a rec room so we started digging out a basement under the house. We'll build it big enough so we can all fit in there. One of the things we're playing around with is that we'll set up our own rock & roll band and call ourselves "The Springman Brothers." My brother Ronnie really wants to be a rock & roll star.

I like to go up to Jerome because there's nobody there. It's a ghost town and peaceful and you can see the whole valley below you. I go up there and think about everything that happened—the war and some of the guys—and try to sort everything out. I've never heard from the guys I was prisoner with.

In some ways I want to hear from them and in other ways I don't. Like I wonder what happened to Hector and Brunswick and I wonder what happened to Snagglepuss and Doofus too—but if I heard from them it would bring everything back and I don't want that. I try not to think of some things that happened over there and I'm sure they feel the same way.

I think that being a prisoner robbed me of some years and some times I might have had, but it also taught me something about understanding human beings and it certainly taught me something about understanding myself. And I'm proud that I never killed anybody over there and never caused anyone harm.

Sometimes, though, I have these dreams and the dreams bring it all back. My dad had dreams for 15 years after his war and I hope I'll be luckier and that mine won't keep up that long.

I'll dream that I'm in the jungle escaping and I get to a clearing and there's a Texaco station there and I can't figure out what the hell a Texaco station is doing in the jungle. Or that I'm working at home on the basement and I suddenly notice that I've got chains on my legs.

I've got two dreams that come back more than any of the others.

I dream that my brother Randy is on a conveyor belt that leads into a meat grinder. I can't do anything to stop the conveyor and it takes Randy into the grinder and he comes out in maybe 15 bits and pieces. The pieces are still alive and I'm trying to put Randy back in one piece again before they die.

I dream that I'm at home and I feel my chest split and my veins contract and my heart pops out. It pops out but it's still beating and I'm watching it outside of me. And Randy's there trying to stuff my heart back inside me.

I guess it's up to Randy and I to keep each other together. Hell, that's what brothers are for.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What were the highlights of the story? What parts did you least like? Why?

2. What changes did Rick go through during his time in Vietnam? What experiences do you think were most important in changing his beliefs? His feelings?

3. Rick said, "Under the circumstances I've been treated fairly." Do you agree that Rick was treated fairly by his Vietnamese captors? What hardships experienced by the prisoners were deliberate punishment? Which were shared by the guards? Give examples to support your answer.

4. How would you have treated Rick if you were one of his Vietnamese guards?

5. Were Rick and his family treated fairly by the U.S. Army? Give examples.

6. How do you think the changes Rick went through have affected his relationships with his family? With his work? His political ideas? Imagining that you are Rick today, write a letter to one of the men who was a prisoner with you. Include what you are doing, your thoughts about events in the U.S., and recollections about your time in Indochina.

Hoa Binh

August thirty-first
Stanley was all excited
She just made eighteen
And got to vote
For the first time
There were sixteen slates
To vote for
In Vietnam that year
And every slate's poster
Said that
That slate
Wanted Hoa Binh
From voting
She came back to me
All excited
Casee
I vote for Hoa Binh
That's nice, Stanley
I did too
Back in Hoa Ky
I hope your vote counts

—Michael Casey

hoa binh: peace
Hoa Ky: United States

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William Calley's story is very different. He participates fully in the war, following the orders of his superiors despite the questions arising in his mind from time to time. When he is singled out to be tried for war crimes by men high in the chain of command, his response is that he was only following orders and doing his job. In his story, Lt. Calley begins to reevaluate whether loyalty to his country means unquestioning obedience to his superiors.

William Calley

William Calley

WILLIAM CALLEY

On March 29, 1971, a military jury convicted Lt. William Calley of the premeditated murder of at least 22 civilians in the village of Mylai in South Vietnam. The issues behind this war-crimes trial—the longest and one of the most sensational in our country's history—raised a flood of debate among the American people.*

Maybe if I were President, I could change things. Till then, I'm like anyone else: I'll carry America's orders out. For that's what the Army is: a chisel, it has to keep sharp and let the American people use it. If the people say, "Go wipe out South America," the Army will do it. Majority rules, and if a majority tells me, "Go to South Vietnam," I will go. If it tells me, "Lieutenant Calley," or "Rusty Calley," or "Whatever, go massacre one thousand communists," I will massacre one thousand communists. But—I won't advocate it. I'm against massacre, and I won't preach it: I won't be a hypocrite for it. Or maybe *that* is a hypocrite, but I'll do as I'm told to. I won't revolt. I'll put the American people above my own conscience, always. I'm an American citizen.

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from Lieutenant Calley: His Own Story as told to John Sack. New York: Viking Press, 1971.

*Estimates ranged between 109 and 567 villagers killed at Mylai.

The trial: we didn't think in November that it would be four months long. The jury* itself took us three days, though. We went through twenty-five officers, most of them prejudiced for me: not personally, but against the Army for trying me. A captain, "It seemed to me, *Somebody was out to railroad somebody.*" A major, "I personally, I didn't think it was right." A lieutenant colonel was most outspoken. His face was hard, tired, weary, worn: I thought of Johnny Cash. And disgusted, as though he had thought, *We're spending thousands of dollars beating the young lieutenant over the goddamn head. The same as we're doing in Vietnam right now.* He came on very defensive.

"Colonel, is your belief prejudicial to the defendant?"

"No."

"Let's put it the other way. Is it prejudicial to the government?"

"Yes."

A full colonel said, "Over there, we never knew who was the enemy, really. A little old twelve-year-old would come up, take your chewing gum, and the next minute drop a grenade."

One of those twenty-five officers said he knew other purported massacres. "Of a similar nature?"

"Of a similar nature."

"Did you ever discuss it with fellow officers?"

"Yes sir. Not only the Mylai incident but similar incidents."

"You were in sympathy with Lieutenant Calley?"

"Yes sir."

"Are you in sympathy with him now?"

"Yes sir."

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*jury: choosing an unprejudiced jury for the trial.

. . . I once saw an open letter to President Nixon.

> Mr. President:
> I protest the court-martial of Lt. William L. Calley, Infantry. You, Sir, I and our nation must share the guilt of Vietnam. Calley is being tried by all conscience-stricken citizens, who see him as a reflection of themselves.

I read that, and it just turned a key inside me. If it's true, I had an obligation to everyone in America: *I must be a reflection they'll want to look at.* The guilt itself: I could do nothing about it. Mylai had happened and it would have to stand pat. But there's more to America than war, I knew, and I should try to reflect that too. I should reflect this so Americans could say, "We are good people, too. We aren't tyrants: we try, we make errors, we do things wrong, but we will change and go on." The guilt would hurt, but I should reflect every part of America's people. Because they're a good and a great and a wonderful people.

I had a tremendous responsibility. If that letter's true, if I was a mirror, really, for America, I had to be very honest now, to tell everything there was of Mylai, to give everyone straight turkey with no Christmas dressing with it. I had a greater responsibility than the prosecutor did. I couldn't say, "I didn't do it." I couldn't bring in a GI, give him a decent dinner, give him a witness fee to testify coming and going for me. "Calley's the greatest thing there was. He was Christ walking over the rice paddies—" No, that isn't honest, it isn't what a court in America should be. I was like someone high on a cliff in Acapulco. I could back out ("No, I didn't do it!"). Or could be brave and say, *I'll give her a jump today.*

. . . It sounded exciting: but I had some secret moments, *I'm not strong enough, I'm not brave enough, I don't really want to go through with it. I can't reflect continuously.* I thought I might cry if the prosecutor said, "He killed a hundred people there." On the trial day, I hadn't slept. I got dressed, I drove to "Calley hall," and I sat down there: I was uptight. . .

I knew, *I'll destroy my dignity if I'm indignant today*, and I kept composure this way: I wrote. I wrote on a white lined pad,

> My largest fear now is if I'll be able to keep control. There is a tremous [I meant tremendous] amount of fear going through me. I'm starting to shake. I'm trying to reconcile myself that I'm not the first to be going through this. But it doesn't help. . .

And that's when the prosecutor began. A captain.

"Gentlemen, I'd like to tell you a little bit about Mylai Four. We want you to *be* there, and we will try to put you there on 16 March, 1968. The village of Mylai Four is located in Quangngai province."

I listened and I became relaxed now. I knew, *He can't hurt me*, the captain could have no idea of Mylai or of what happened there. He had never been to Vietnam: to war anywhere, and he was so dissociated from it. He said I had done premeditated murder there. It's true: I sat up with sergeants in the wee hours of March 16, 1968, and I plotted to kill those people in Mylai Four. I filled up the cartridge clips, and god! How premeditated can you get? Of course, in Vietnam we called it a combat assault.

"At seven-thirty," the captain went on, "the helicopters set on the western side of Mylai the accused and the first platoon. They disembarked, but they

didn't receive any fire. They found the village undefended. They found women, found children, found old men: none of them armed. Some of them still eating breakfast. So the accused's platoon began to gather these up. These unarmed men, women, children, *babies*, were taken to the southern side of the village by PFC Paul B. Meadlo, Spec Four Dennis I. Conti. The accused directed, 'Take care of these people.' The accused left. Meadlo and Conti guarded the men, the women, the children, the babies. Calley returned. 'Why haven't you taken care of these people?' 'We *have* taken care of them. Guarded them.' 'I mean kill them. Waste them.' And with full bursts of automatic fire, Meadlo and Calley shot those people, those unarmed unresisting—"

He just didn't understand it, the captain. Killing people in war's something new? Now what in the hell *else* is war than killing people? And destroying their homes and their farms and their way of life: that's war! And who in the hell is hurt besides civilians? I sat and I heard the captain talk and I could almost cry: I thought of the thousands of men, thousands of women, thousands of children, thousands of babies slaughtered in Vietnam, the bodies rotting away. The captain didn't seem to know about them. I did: I had been in Vietnam.

* * * * * *

One thing we were taught at OCS [Officer Candidate School] for twenty years we had thought was bad. To kill, and a sergeant in gym shorts and a T-shirt taught it. We sat around, and he kicked another man in the kidney: a few inches lower, really, or this could be a lethal kick. It was just gruesome: a *POP*, and I thought, *Oh, god. No one can live through that.* He really kicked, or he flipped a man with karate and *WHAM*: he would show us the follow-up. . . We never became proficient though. We did better at cleaning rifles: an M-16 is less gruesome to kill someone with. We thought, *We will go to Vietnam and be Audie Murphys.* Kick in the door, run in the hootch* [house], *give it a good burst*—kill. And get a big kill ratio in Vietnam. Get a big kill count.

One thing at OCS was nobody said, "Now, there will be innocent civilians there." Oh sure, there will in Saigon. In the secure areas, the Vietnamese may be clapping the way the French in the '44 newsreels do, "Yay for America!" But we would be somewhere else: be in VC country. It was drummed into us, "Be sharp! On guard! As soon as you think these people won't kill you, *ZAP*! In combat you haven't friends! You have enemies!" Over and over at OCS we heard this, and I told myself, *I'll act as if I'm never secure. As if everyone in Vietnam would do me in. As if everyone's bad.* I went from OCS to Hawaii: to Charlie company, First battalion, Twentieth infantry, and I still didn't hear of innocent civilians. All autumn we landed on beaches or climbed the Kahukus: the tallest, the steepest, the meanest mountains there are if you're infantry, antelopes, mountain goats—anything. We were taught how to assault them, how to take basecamps, how to kill enemy: for Charlie was really made for war! We were mean! We were ugly! We never conceived of old people, men, women, children, babies: of Vietnamese being near us. Never did anyone tell us—

Oh no, I'm wrong. The day before we went to Vietnam, we were given an orientation talk, *Vietnam*

*Audie Murphy: was the most decorated GI in World War II. A number of films, including "To Hell and Back," were made about his life as a soldier.

Our Host. I should know: I had to give it (I also gave *Chemical, Biological, and Radiological Warfare*). The company made a horseshoe around me. I kept telling it, "Wake up! We're going to Vietnam! Wake up! Because it's our host—" Oh, what a farce that was. I read off a list of "Do"s and "Don't"s that the Pentagon sent us. Items like—I don't remember. Do not insult the women. Do not *assault* the women. And—I'm too foggy about it. Items like "Be polite."

I had only three minutes for *Vietnam Our Host.* I did a very very poor job of it. I realize that now.

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We went to Vietnam on Pan American Airways. We landed there on December 1, 1967, in—I didn't know, it could be Ojis, India, and I wouldn't know. I acted asinine that day. I almost thought, *It is hand-to-hand combat today*, and I stood in the trailer truck like the meanest, the most tremendous, the most dangerous weapon there is. My rifle slung low. My helmet pulled down. I even scowled! I realize now, I couldn't impress the Vietnamese less. None of them looked at me: *Another truck of GIs? Big deal. . .* But still I felt, *This is my day!* And these are my men! We're rough and we're tough, and Charlie's here: Charging Charlie! To end this damned war tomorrow!

. . . So that was us: Charlie company, and we were in Vietnam now. And seeing it through the open doors of a cattle car: a shanty land, the houses of cardboard and tin. I was awed: there seemed to be no nice sections anywhere. I felt superior there. I thought, *I'm the big American from across the sea. I'll sock it to these people here.*

We continued south. We took up residence inside our AO: our operations area, and met the Vietnamese people there. One thousand kids, out to solicit the laundry business when we had guard duty on a Vietnamese bridge. All the men loved them. Gave the kids candy, cookies, chewing gum, everything. Not me: I hated them. I had promised myself, *I'll act as if I'm never secure.* I hollered, I yelled, I threw rocks, I threw little kids in the river—yes! I was afraid of Vietnamese kids. At OCS, I had heard enough of kids putting things in a gasoline tank or a GI's hooch. I kept yelling, "Go or I throw you in water."

"You no do it, GI! Vietnamese bridge! I Vietnamese! I stay on bridge! Tonight, I bring all VC

to bridge—" Oh, they would tantalize us. "I bring VC and they *cacadow* [kill] all American GI! I stay on bridge!"

"Okay, I throw you in."

"No throw me in—" I would throw him in. And listen to every kid say, "Oh, throw me in, GI!" They actually loved it.

* * * * * * *

[Calley tells about leading ambush parties which never located any of the enemy.]

But there the depression set in. After my second, my third, my fourth, my fifth, my tenth, my twelfth, my twentieth—ambush, I still hadn't had a VC in my killing zone, and I had had perfect ambush sites, too. I thought, *What am I pulling ambushes for?* I hadn't met any VC in the daylight either. What am I running patrols for? Or looking for? Or humping for? What did I have sixteen months of training for? Now, Charlie was made for killing! Charlie was made for war! Charlie was combat infantry: *We want to kill!*

Not half as much as our colonel did. He kept asking us, "Any body count?"

"No sir."

"No body count?"

"Nobody there to shoot at."

"You better get on the stick sometime."

"Yes sir."

It got so, I cringed if I ever heard helicopter blades. Our colonel would look for VC suspects from—oh, ten thousand feet, and play platoon leader with us. "Oh, Charlie One? I spotted a VC suspect. A few minutes from you." Of course, the Colonel could go a kilometer in thirty seconds and I was in the damn foliage: it might take me a lifetime. "Go where the purple

smoke is, Charlie One." Of course, there was a fifty-meter hill in between us.

"Negative on the purple smoke."

"You don't see it? You idiot, I'll throw another purple smoke."

"Negative on the purple smoke."

"You idiot! It's right on the other side of the little hill!"

I got just a little fed up. He had that damned chopper there, he should land it and capture the VC suspect himself. Or shoot him: I had to walk there, as if I couldn't be ambushed at that purple smoke.

"Get the VC, Charlie One?"

"Yeah."

"Get any body count?"

"No. It's just an old lady taking her taxes in." Or a little boy, or a little girl, or it might be a farmer there with a wooden hoe. I would radio, "He seems friendly."

"Oh does he? He has that damn corral there. What is *it?*"

"You said it: a damn corral. He seems proud of it."

"Destroy it."

"You want to destroy it? All right," I would say, and I would tear the corral apart, get all the wood together, get a hot fire going—

"You didn't get a body count?"

"No—"

"You better start doing the job, Lieutenant, or I'll find someone who can."

I thought, *Oh, forget it, Colonel. What do you really want of me? Shoot him?* If all you can think of is *Kill them. Kill*—the war's never over. You stay there another day and you can kill someone else. And someone *else*. Or do you kill everyone in South Vietnam? And say, "We have won, we are going home."

I imagine so: just everything in today's society is "How many thousands?" "How many millions?" "How many billions?" And everything was in Vietnam: was numbers, and I had to furnish them. So television could say, "We killed another thousand today," and Americans say, "Our country's great."

The body count—damn. I did what every lieutenant had to: I finally got us a body count. I mean I reported it. One night I said, "We have incoming, sergeant."

"Sir?"

"We have incoming rounds."

"I see." He went where the GIs were, and *tata-tata-tata*: he started shooting it up. Artillery guns, machine guns, we had a mock little firefight, and I called in a body count: three, and a combat loss of some compasses. It was near inventory time, and I had lost those compasses somehow. . .

On patrols, the GIs didn't talk to each other much. A GI might tell me, "I don't want to carry this [empty water can].

"Why do I have to carry an empty can?"

I didn't know. I didn't know why a cheap plastic water can is a nonexpendable item. I didn't know why a GI pays ninety-eight cents for losing one. Or why we were on this damn patrol, and I didn't want the GIs asking me. Imagine if I answered honestly—

"Why are we doing it?"

"Because the Captain said so."

"Why did the Captain say so?"

"I didn't ask."

"It's a simple question, isn't it? Why didn't you ask?"

"Because the Captain would tell me, 'Because the Colonel said so.' And then I would probably ask him, "Why did the Colonel say so?"

"Why did the Colonel say so?"

"Because the General told him, 'I've got nothing better to do.' "

"If they've nothing better to do, Lieutenant—why are we in Vietnam?"

Seriously. OCS always told us, GIs will think you're a dumb damned officer if you can't answer them, and I knew, *I can't*. I couldn't bring the GIs' spirits up: I wondered too, *Now where in the hell are the VC here? Or aren't there any?*

* * * * * *

I got so I stayed away from the troops. I went through my chain of command: my sergeants, and I would communicate through them. I liked the Army sergeants: the professionals, who just didn't question the United States Army and the United States. But the young privates—well, if I even stopped for a C-ration lunch with one he would ask me, "Why are we in Vietnam, sir?"

"We are here to stop communism. If we don't, it will conquer all of Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand—"

"But sir. How is this getting shot at stopping communism? We still haven't seen a VC."

"Write to your congressman, damn it! I didn't draft you."

... I did as OCS taught me. I didn't say, "I'm the boss around here," but I let the GIs think it. I knew, *I am one little pea in a peapod. And they're churning us up into pea-soup*, but I didn't say it. I had this thing, and I didn't drop it. I acted big: I tried to let everyone think, *We accomplish things here.* I tried to keep up the espirit de corps.

I didn't. I let those doubts show, and the GIs saw through me: I read it in Hersh.* They said,

*Seymour Hersh's book, Mylai 4.

"Who is Calley kidding?"

He made something out of himself he wasn't.
He reminded me of a kid trying to play war.
Everyone used to joke about him.

I was a phoney: true. The best thing might be if I had been honest, I think—but no. . . I couldn't say, "I don't know what I'm doing here. I think I'm screwed up. And the Army's screwed up. But men: tomorrow we go to Mylai One. *And kill those*—" I couldn't say it, I couldn't think it! What do I do if America's really screwed up? Defect?

I wasn't about to. I believe in America, and I wouldn't be disloyal to it. I wouldn't say, "Captain Medina, I'm sorry. You've only got two platoons."

"No, I've got three platoons. I've got the first platoon, the second—"

"I'm sorry. The first platoon just walked off." Certainly not, I wouldn't throw down my rifle and say, "I quit," or demoralize the GIs just because of beliefs. In Vietnam, I wore a large face and I tried to keep people's spirits up: I did what every officer ought to. . .

Something new: we went to a Vietnamese village where the GI morale went *up*. Someone there had been shooting us with mortar shells even, but, of course, when we got there everyone was an old papasan, an old mamasan, or a child saying, "We love the GIs." Everyone was friendly until we started to turn up VC flags. I realized then, *We were being taunted. We were being made a mockery of.* And damn it: when we moved out of this village and we were a hundred meters from it, they again socked it to us. Medina* phoned, and he got province permission to go to that village to burn it. That's what the GIs wanted:

*Medina: Calley's superior, a Captain in the Army.

to burn it! They held up their matches and Zippos, and they burned the hooches down. The people looked shocked, as though telling us, "Gee, you're burning our houses down." And they picked up and left us. They didn't patronize us. They knew the GIs meant business now.

... If you're a GI who has lost eighteen friends in a minefield with a Vietnamese village a few hundred meters away—well. You think, *Why didn't the Vietnamese signal us? Why didn't the Vietnamese tell us, "Hey, there's a minefield there." Why didn't the Vietnamese help us? . . . Or simply say to us afterwards; "We're sorry about it."* Never; they sat in front of their hooches talking, twiddling thumbs, and all saying, "Gee, I see an American unit," "I wonder what it is doing," "*I* know what it is doing," "Hahaha." If these people won't lift a finger, a GI will say, *damn them. I'm here to help these people, and they couldn't care less.* And so a bad feeling sets in.

... As for me, I didn't touch a Vietnamese if I didn't have to interrogate him. Say if I was at a village and I was fired on. But everyone there was a nice sweet person like on a Southern porch. All right, I would get a head honcho or—I don't know, I'd get someone there, and I would ask him, "*VC adai?*" Or "*VC adoe?*" It may be fictitious, but I was told these are Vietnamese sentences for "Where are the VC?" They are the only sentences I know, "*VC adai?*"

"*No bitt,*" "I don't know."

"*VC adoe?*"

"*No bitt,*" "I don't know."

I had a GI interpreter with me: Specialist Grzesik. In Hawaii, Grzesik had taken forty-five days of Vietnamese: Saigonese dialect, and up north he would

always tell me, "I can't understand him." But you don't need an interpreter for "I don't know," and that's what the Vietnamese told us. It frustrated us. That someone could shoot an AK-41 and people wouldn't know it. The soldiers would tell me, "Strange damn place! I could of swore that a VC was shooting at me." I couldn't go back to Medina again or to higher and say, "I'm back."

"What did you ask the Vietnamese?"

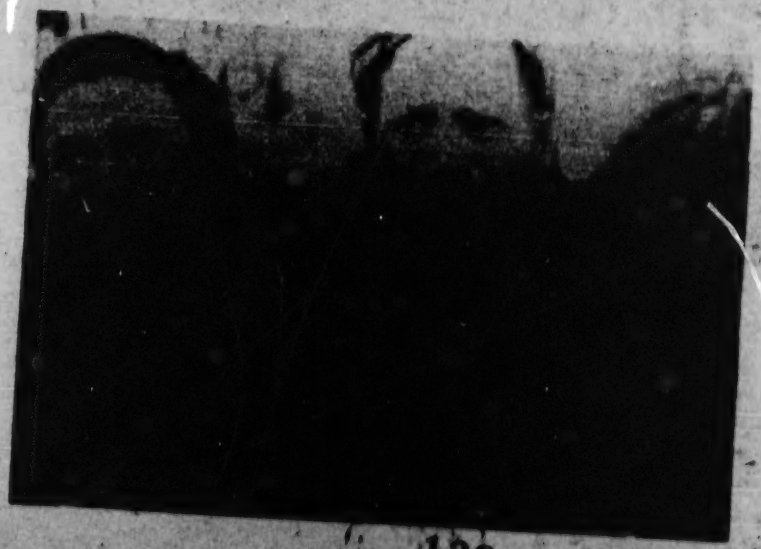
"VC adai."

"What did the Vietnamese tell you?"

"No bitt."

"You're an Army officer, aren't you—"

I knew I would hear it. An officer ought to get results: okay, so I sometimes shook up a Vietnamese who kept telling me, *"No bitt."* I just popped him as I asked him, *"VC adai?"* To begin with, to *touch* a Vietnamese head is degrading him. And everyone did it.



... As for me, I didn't care to make people cry, but I was an Army officer and I had to get that intelligence. I would pop a Vietnamese in the mouth, sometimes. If it threw him, I stepped on his ankle bone and I started to grind it. I may have killed a Vietnamese once: a horrible thing, but I have to live with it. He was kneeling, and I was kicking him as I asked him the *"VC adai"* and the *"VC adoe."* I meant to break some ribs but he turned black and blue and he just passed out. A medic said, "You busted his kidney." I never shot a Vietnamese, but I did make believe to. I would say, *"Cacadowit"* or "Kill," and I'd take the Vietnamese out behind the house. I'd fire, I'd let a GI give a good-sized scream, and I'd ask another one, *"VC adai?"* It never worked: the VC knew—the Vietnamese knew I was joking about it. They still told me, *"No bitt."*

Nothing worked ever. Had it, I guess the newspaper stories might say, "Calley was a tremendous man. He broke the Vietnamese's legs, or ripped their nails out, or cut their fingers off. He learned where the VC camps were, and he saved a thousand lives." But it didn't work, so I was a dummy and I didn't continue it. One day, Grzesik, the GI interpreter, told me, "It's futile. I don't want to ask these questions." I kept beating the man but god! It hit me that night like a ton of bricks, I realized, *Grzesik's right.* I was torturing them, and I wasn't getting answers. I was just hurting them, and I stopped it: I stopped as fast as I'd started it: I went along, and I didn't even say, *"VC adai,"* anymore. I realized, *I've been foolish.* I had been asking everyone where the VC were: I had been talking to VC myself! That is why everyone said, "I don't know." They weren't about to tell me, "I surrender."

At last it dawned on me, *These people, they're all the VC.* I realize, there are Americans who say, "How do you really know it?" Well, I was there. I made decisions. I needed answers, and I didn't have a more logical one. We had an AO of five hundred square kilometers, and if those people weren't all VC then prove it to me. Show me that someone was for the American forces there. Show me that someone helped us and fought the VC. Show me that someone wanted us: one example only! I didn't see any. A story: I used to see wicker baskets everywhere. And every basket was upside down, I could see. Strange: but Intelligence said if Americans are around, it's a VC signal to turn their basket upside down. And everyone's basket was upside down. . .

As soon as I understood it, I wasn't frustrated anymore. I wasn't fooled anymore. I went through the villages, and I didn't say, "*VC, odai,*" anymore. I said, "How are the VC today?" And, "You're a VC, aren't you?" And, "Everyone here is a VC, isn't he?" The people would tell me, "No no. We love the GIs. We give you water—" Hell, if I let them they'd poison the water, too. I didn't listen: I just walked on.

I had no love for these people now. I did have a few weeks earlier, but it had been slowly driven out.

. . . Once, we came to a village where we really caught a VC, rifle and all. I don't exaggerate: I pulled him out of a secret room. He had gone through a crack, around a corner, and then behind a fireplace with an AK-41. We found him, though, and I sent him to military police with a manilla tag on: name, location, etcetera, and on the back something like "Found behind false wall." You won't believe it: I caught him again a few weeks later. In the same village again. And wearing the same manilla tag as though

telling us, "I've been interrogated, and I'm okay. I've got a ticket to ride!" Of course, he had taken charcoal and he had crossed out the "Found behind false wall." I told myself, *He has probably killed two or three of us. And the MPs* [military police] *didn't do a damn thing with him.* I went there angry: I said, "I didn't call him a VCS," a VC suspect. "I said a VC!"

"Well, fine. So why didn't you go and shoot him? I can't," the MP said. "I'm at headquarters with the Geneva people* on me."

"But you've got a POW camp—"

"A prisoner, I've got to give him a bed, a blanket, a pillow, and three square meals every day. And so many cubic meters space: I haven't space."

"But the guy's a VC—"

"All of these guys are VC. But they could tell me, 'I'm Egyptian,' and I'd have to believe them. . .

"I'd love to be in the field with you. I'd take every prisoner and I'd kill every damn one. Do it, Lieutenant, or you're going to see these people back."

I didn't tell the GIs that: but I didn't have to. From then on, they would ask me, "Why don't we do something to these people?"

"What do you want to do? Send them to Task Force? They're going to send them back out."

"My god, sir. I want to do *something*."

"Well, what do you want to do, troop? Talk to these people? Go in and pacify them?"

"Hell no! I want to go in and shoot them!"

I wouldn't let the GIs do it. . . I just couldn't let the GIs kill without having orders to. Suppose an American politician told me, "That's horrible! If that woman was a VC, why didn't she have her uniform on? Her weapon?" I couldn't authorize that, and yet —I thought about it. I was troubled about it. My duty in our whole area was to find, to close with, and to destroy the VC. I had now found the VC. Everyone there was VC. The old men, the women, the children—the *babies* were all VC or would be VC in about three years. And inside of VC women, I guess there

*The Geneva Accords were signed in 1954 as an end to the first Vietnam war. The Accords called for an International Control Commission made up of Polish, Canadian and Indian observers.

were a thousand little VC now. I thought, *Damn it, what do I do? . . . Chop up all of these people?*

. . . Everyone said eliminate them. I never met someone who didn't say it. A captain told me, "Damn it. I sit with my starlight scope, and I see VC at this village every night. I could go home if I could eliminate it." A colonel: he told me about a general's briefing where the general said, "By god, if you're chasing dead VC and you're chasing them to that village, do it! I'll answer for it! I'll answer for it!"

. . . The day we got orders to Mylai, we had services for Sergeant Cox. A well-liked soldier in Charlie company—well, we never lost a soldier who wasn't liked. I haven't the vaguest idea why he had picked up a 105 artillery shell with a bamboo handle on it. A lieutenant said, "*Put the damn thing down,*" but it went off: it blew him to hell. It had been booby-trapped.

We had services at our task force headquarters camp, a camp known as Dotti. We got ourselves halfway decent: shirts on and trousers bloused, to sit around an old artillery emplacement of 55-gallon gasoline drums full of dirt, sand, or cement, or on some sandbag bunkers: a bleachers, sort of. Medina kept yelling at us, "Calley! Where are your people?"

"Sir, they're all here."

"Brooks! Where are your people?"

"Sir—"

It soon dawned on Captain Medina, *The company's here.* We had been out in Vietnamese villages for three months now. We were together and god! We were fifty or sixty soldiers short.

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After the prayers for Sergeant Cox, the Captain stood up to say some niceties and say, "We still have a war to fight, everyone. We haven't got time to cry about this. It's over with. It's done with. Forget it: especially since we are going to Pinkville tomorrow." Pinkville: that was our company's name for Mylai One. On maps it was colored pink, and as soon as Medina mentioned it the troops sat up. Or *woke* up. Medina went on, "We're going after the 48th battalion. And they outnumber us two to one. At *least*, and there will be heavy casualties tomorrow."

I thought, *Hell. He didn't have to say it. Everyone knew it:* Alpha and Bravo companies had been there before. And men had their heads blown off: I mean literally, or were vegetables now at Walter Reed*, in Washington. As soon as you're close to Pinkville you're in a wall-to-wall minefield. And you're being fired on from front and behind: from the "civilians" in Mylai Six. . . And if they're with you as POW's, they're pulling pins out of your damn grenades. And you're saying, "God! They're everywhere," and you're running in every which way. And you're dying like flies: it happened to Alpha, it happened to Bravo, it would happen to Charlie tomorrow.

To me. I knew now, *It's a lottery here. It's a man taking names from a ballot box.* A good guy, or bad guy, or just anyone could get it. By being just at the wrong place at the wrong time: that's all. And what could be wronger than to be in Vietnam in March, 1968: in Tet? It was stupid, it was idiotic to use a company against a battalion tomorrow. It was against the Manual. Of course, if I'm told, "Go to China tomorrow alone. And annihilate it," I have to go. With gusto! Or go to Pinkville without asking, "Why?" A second lieutenant is not anyone to ask it. . .

We had a Plan, Medina was telling everyone now. And went to a Jeep: and taking a shovel out, he drew in the sand beneath him a map of our operation area. From left to right, this was Mylai Four, Mylai Five, Mylai Six, and Mylai One: or Pinkville, on the China sea. Pinkville now was the VC basecamp, Medina said, but we didn't want to get fired on from behind and we would start at Mylai Four. And continue to Mylai Five, Mylai Six, and Mylai One. "We mustn't let anyone get behind us," Medina said, as I remember it. "Alpha and Bravo got messed up because they let the VC get behind them. And took heavy casualties and lost their momentum, and it was their downfall. Our job," Medina said, "is to go in rapidly and to neutralize everything. To kill everything."

"Captain Medina? Do you mean women and children, too?"

"I mean everything."

. . . I worry sometimes now. I lie awake, and I think of Mylai and say, *My god. Whatever inspired me to do it?* But truthfully: there was no other way. America's motto there was "Win in Vietnam," and in Mylai there was no other way to do it. No wonder an Army officer is so aggravated today. He has trained hard to forget, *To kill a man's wrong.* He psychs himself up, and someone tells him, "Okay! Get your people up! Get ready!" . . . He gets ready, and the Man says, "Stop! You aren't ready." *Damn, I haven't tried yet.* So the second time: so the same routine. "Stop! We aren't doing it." *Frustration*, and the final time he gets ready, he has that mission and he accomplishes it. "No no no! We didn't want you to kill anyone! We wanted to win their hearts and minds!"

My god. You shouldn't teach us killing then.

*Walter Reed: Army hospital in Washington, D.C.

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. . . On the choppers: there the adrenalin started. We felt as automobile racers do: *A split second, and I might hit the very edge of disaster. Or pass it.* We had about twenty thousand rounds for our M-16s with us—four hundred for every man. And fifteen thousand for our machine guns, and four hundred grenades for our M-79 launchers, and a dozen shells for our 81-millimeter mortar. The choppers around us had fire behind them: the M-5 grenade launchers, the rocket launchers, and the miniguns were on Mylai already. A minigun: a super machine gun, in a minute it can have holes in every square foot of a football field. It was just devastating fire!

. . . I thought, *Well, here we go,* I got up, I jumped —I didn't move. I tried, I just forced myself, I jumped a few meters into the paddies under me. The troops jumped out of the chopper behind me. Ahead of us: Mylai Four.

I'm going to die sometime: I had always known it. Ignored it: and knocked on the door of death today, and I couldn't ignore it. The fear now: I was saturated with it. I *felt* it, I kept running but it took extra effort to. A bullet: a pretty good way to go, I knew. No fuss. No muss, I wouldn't even know it was hitting me. A mine: that's worse, to wake up and think, *Now, what did I lose? My legs: I still have my arms, though,* I would try to think positively. Of the great guys who run around, jump out of planes, hop up a mountainside with an artificial leg. I would think, *I'm out, I don't have to worry anymore. . .*

The fear: nearly everyone had it. And everyone had to destroy it: Mylai, the source of it. And everyone moved into Mylai firing automatic. And went rapidly, and the GIs shot people rapidly. Or grenaded them. Or just bayoneted them: to stab, to throw

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someone aside, to go on. Supposedly, the GIs said, "Chalk one up." "Hey, I got another one." . . . I didn't hear it: I just heard Medina telling me, "Keep going," and I said, "*Keep going! Keep going! Keep—*"

. . . Medina says now, "You have to use common sense." Well, I wasn't taught at OCS to use common sense: I was taught, "Do this! Do this like this!" In combat, if Medina had really told me, "Use common sense," I'd have said, "Sure, I'm going back to Hawaii." To use saturation fire: to use rifles, rockets, cannons, mortars, miniguns, and machine guns on a little guerilla—hell, to go to Vietnam to fight him, is that common sense? It is America's strategy, though. To keep putting the "stuff" out: to kill everyone in Mylai before someone gets an AK rifle out. . .

I didn't say, "Kill babies," but I simply knew, *It will happen.* I knew if I was in Mylai with twenty thousand rounds, if I didn't shoot at paper targets there would be men, women, children, and babies hurt. It's chaos in combat, and I couldn't tell the GIs that day, "Be careful now."

. . . I can't answer those who say, "Man, how can you kill someone?"

"I don't know," I say. "Use a rifle, I guess. Or stab him. Or burn him. Or some other way. And you?"

"I couldn't kill anyone."

"Even if they would kill *you*?"

"I couldn't kill anyone."

"Well, you'll be a poor soldier then."

Team of investigators from the United States and South Vietnam search for evidence at Mylai

"I couldn't live with it."

A silly statement, I think. Most of America's males were in Korea or World War II or I. They killed, and they aren't all going crazy. They simply escaped it. The human mind: I think it has more defense mechanisms than it has smarts. As for me, killing those men in Mylai didn't haunt me. I didn't—I couldn't kill for the pleasure of it. We weren't in Mylai to kill human beings, really. We were there to kill *ideology* that is carried by—I don't know. Pawns. Blobs. Pieces of flesh, and I wasn't in Mylai to destroy intelligent men. I was there to destroy an intangible idea.

To destroy communism. Now, I hate to say it, but most people know a lot more about communism than I do. In school I never thought about it. I just dismissed it: I looked at communism as a Southerner looks at a Negro, supposedly, *It's evil, It's bad.* I went to school in the 1950's, remember, and it was drilled into us from grammar school on, *Ain't is bad, aren't is good, communism's bad, democracy's good. One and one's two*, etcetera: until when we were at Edison High, we just didn't think about it.

... Those people are monsters, and they have no qualms, no hang-ups, no holding-backs to the extremes they'll go to. I mean butcherings: that is what communism does, and we were there in Mylai to destroy it. Personally, I didn't kill any Vietnamese that day: I mean personally. I represented the United States of America. My country.

... I had come here to stop communism: to show these people that the American way is a better one. I had believed it: I had been briefed for twenty-five years how America is the greatest there is. Just look at American cars! American houses, and in just eighty years they are paid for! American

swimming pools—gosh! A year in Vietnam had just bolstered me. I had just thought, *It's filthy here. It's unsanitary here. The people live in grass houses here*—I never thought, *I can learn something here.* Or why weren't they in America helping *us*. . .

I once heard a colonel say, "Face it. To win here, we've got to tear away their whole way of life." A life in Asia might not be important: there are a billion there. But their heritage, there's only one. I didn't think that in Vietnam it's death before dishonor, and I had dishonored them. . .

Once, I had looked at a Vietnamese map. And I couldn't recognize it. I had thought, *Where in the hell is America?* The center was Asia, and we were on the outer edges. We had to be put together again. We had been split. I had thought, *Oh, the Vietnamese have a screwy map:* I didn't think, *I'm not that great after all.*

... Americans like to think that war is John Wayne. To get a grenade and a VC's throat, to shove the grenade right down it. Americans sit at television sets and say, "One hundred bodies. Boy!" And they think, *Great*; and they think that I'm the ugly one. I tell you, a hundred bodies still are a hundred people, and if they're dead their guts are just hanging out. And that's pretty horrible: I had once thought, *Oh, war is hell.* And then I saw war, and I could only sit and cry. And ask, *Why did I do it?* Why didn't I stand on a corner and say, "It's wrong." Why didn't I burn my draft card, and I wouldn't have had to go?

I didn't know. I was just an American who was put together with a philosophy: democracy's right. And there was no gray and white, no beige and white, no other colors: there was just black or white, and I was to kill someone if his philosophy's wrong.

. . . I'm different now. I said a long while ago, if Americans tell me, "Go massacre one thousand communists," I will massacre one thousand communists. No longer: today if Americans said, "Go to Mylai. Kill everyone there," I would refuse to. I'd really say, "It's illegal, and I can't be a part of it." Of course, to kill everyone in Mylai isn't the only illegal thing we do. To evacuate them is illegal too: is against the Geneva convention*, I've learned. Is kidnapping them. To burn their houses is very illegal, and I don't know why the Judge didn't say, "A reasonable man would realize it: *One shouldn't burn a Vietnamese village.* It is against the Uniform Code of Military Justice, Article CIX." It doesn't carry death, but it does carry five years at Leavenworth. Hell, to just *be* in Mylai with an M-16 and some ammunition is illegal too. . . . I now think, to go to Vietnam is illegal too.

To go to war anywhere. As for me, I went to Vietnam believing, *I will stop communism. And there will be no one ever to hurt us. And there will be No More War.* I think every man in Vietnam—in history thought, *I'll go and there will be No More War.*

. . . Ironic: I had an audience now, I now could talk and be listened to. Some people said, "He shouldn't be tried: simply hanged." And some people said, "No, he should be tried. As long as he is

*Geneva convention: An international conference of the nations involved in World War II at which rules for warfare were agreed upon. Article 49 prohibits the forcible transfer and deportation of people from occupied territory unless it is imperative for military reasons or for the safety of the people. As soon as the hostilities are over, the people must be transferred back to their homes. The occupying power is responsible for providing healthy, safe conditions and keeping members of the same family together.

Article 5 prohibits the destruction of property except where it is absolutely necessary for military reasons.

hanged afterwards." And some people went the whole other way too. I didn't care: I knew, *They'll listen to me.* I had visions then: I'll get out, I'll talk everywhere in America, and I'll tell it I'm one little finger of a Frankenstein monster. A probe that it sent to Vietnam that is home now to tell it, "No More War."

I have those visions still: for I am still here on Arrowhead road* and it still isn't in, the jury. The actual jury: the President, and the American people. . . I wish the American people would say, "We aren't Almighty God." And would look at the blacks and the Jews and the yellow race and the Buddhists and say, "And what do I have that is any better?" As for me, I like Christianity. A man could tell me, "It isn't true, It's really a spoof and—" I wouldn't care. I still enjoy it: I know, *I'm happy with it.* A man with a little paddy says, "I like something else, and I'm happy too." I ask would communism hurt him? It wouldn't hurt him a damned bit! Compared to a war, communism would be a godsend.

No war anymore: I'm optimistic about it. America is a brave nation. And we'll say, "All right. We believe this. If you don't, fine. We will live happily." I see it so vividly! I think of our fifty thousand dead, I think of their million dead: I think of the bodies in Mylai Four. All rotting, and I think, *Can there be any good from it?* Maybe there can. The horrors of war came together at Mylai on March 16, 1968. And maybe someday the GIs who went there will say, *Now the world knows what war is. And now the world really hates it. And now there is No More War.*

*Calley was confined to his apartment ("house arrest").

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the ways in which Lt. Calley's training in the Army affected his attitude toward Vietnamese civilians? His behavior at Mylai? Give examples.

2. What is Calley's definition of the responsibilities of an American citizen? Do you agree or disagree? Explain.

3. If you were a lawyer for the defense in Calley's trial, what arguments would you use? If you were a lawyer for the prosecution, what arguments would you use?

You may want to use the following information: The Nuremberg trial of 29 Nazi officers after World War II adopted the principle that "a higher law sometimes requires men to give their allegiance to humanity rather than the state."

The accused pleaded "state orders," but the legal tribunal rejected the argument, hanged the ten war criminals and put one other in prision.

This principal was incorporated in international law as contained in a UN report: "The fact that a person acted pursuant to the orders of government or superior does not relieve him of responsibility under international law, provided a moral choice was, in fact, possible for him."

4. You are a member of the military jury that was trying Calley. Which do you think is the basic issue of the trial?

a) Calley was or was not acting under orders from his superiors.
b) Calley did or did not actually kill civilians.
c) Calley did or did not believe everyone in the village was the enemy and therefore had to be destroyed.
d) There was or was not active encouragement or implied approval by his superiors for this kind of action.

5. Can you think of other situations in which you might be ordered by your parents, a teacher, an employer or the government to do something that you considered wrong?

6. If you were in Lt. Calley's position, how would you define "the enemy"? Do you personally agree or disagree with this definition?

7. William Calley said, "I'll carry America's orders out . . . If the people say, 'Go wipe out South America,' the Army will do it. Majority rules . . ." Do you agree with Calley that the American people decide foreign policy?

a) What methods are open to American citizens to express their views about American foreign policy? What input does your family have? you and others in your school? What groups or individuals have more input into American foreign policy than the average citizen?
b) Which government and military bodies are involved in deciding American foreign policy?
c) Which of these bodies is responsive to the opinions of voters?
d) Discuss: What role does majority rule play in determining American foreign policy?

The following survey was given in May and June of 1971, weeks after the conviction of Lt. Calley to nearly one thousand people across the country. Before studying the responses given by those who took the poll, answer the question at the top and choose the reason or reasons that are closest to your own. Compare your response and the responses of your class as a whole with the percentages listed on the survey. Discuss.

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TABLE 1

ATTITUDE TOWARD TRIAL OF LT. CALLEY

"There has been a good deal of discussion about whether or not Lt. Calley should have been brought to trial in the first place. Considering what you have seen, heard or read, do you approve or disapprove of Lt. Calley having been brought to trial?"

Approve 34% (*N*=301) Disapprove 58% (*N*=521) Don't know 8% (*N*=69)

Reasons	Agree with	Most important
Among respondents approving of trial:		
a. Even a soldier in a combat situation has no right to kill defenseless civilians and anyone who violates this rule must be brought to trial	53%	27%
b. The trial helps to make clear the immorality and cruelty of the Vietnam war and of the way we are fighting it	45	20
c. To preserve its honor, the Army has to bring to trial anyone accused of breaking its rules of warfare	45	14
d. The trial helps to put across the important idea that every man must bear responsibility for his own actions	48	18
e. Many other U.S. soldiers have been tried for crimes in Vietnam; it would be unfair to let Lt. Calley off without a trial	40	8
f. None of these or don't know	14	14
Among respondents disapproving of trial:		
a. It is unfair to send a man to fight in Vietnam and then put him on trial for doing his duty	83	45
b. The trial keeps us from facing the real issue; what's wrong is the war and the way it is being fought, not just the actions of an individual soldier	43	9
c. The trial is an insult to our fighting men and weakens the morale of the U.S. army	64	11
d. The trial used Lt. Calley as a scapegoat: one young lieutenant shouldn't be blamed for the failures of his superiors	67	15
e. Many other U.S. soldiers have done the same kinds of things as Lt. Calley; it is unfair to single out one man and put him on trial	69	15
f. None of these or don't know	3	5

Both these tables come from a paper by Herbert C. Kalman and Lee H. Lawrence of Harvard University, entitled "Assignment of Responsibility in the Case of Lt. Calley: Preliminary Report on a National Survey." Reprinted from the Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 28., No. 1, 1972.

TABLE 3

RESPONSES ON ITEMS ASSESSING ATTITUDES TOWARD CALLEY'S ACTION

Item	Total sample *N*= 989
A. What would most people do if ordered to shoot all inhabitants of a Vietnamese village suspected of aiding the enemy, including old men, women and children:	
Follow orders and shoot	67%
Refuse to shoot them	19
B. What would you do in this situation:	
Follow orders and shoot	51
Refuse to shoot	33
C. Assuming it is true that Calley received orders to shoot, what should he have done:	
Carry out	61
Refuse to carry out	29
D. Overall opinion of Calley's action:	
Right—what any good soldier would do under the circumstances	29
Wrong—but hard for him to know right or wrong in this situation	39
Wrong—clear violation of military code	6
Wrong—violation of morality regardless of military code	17
E. Calley's actions justified if people he shot were Communists:	
Agree	37
Disagree	51
F. Calley's actions justified because better to kill some S. Vietnamese civilians than risk lives of American soldiers:	
Agree	47
Disagree	39
G. In World War II it would have been better to kill some German civilians than risk lives of American soldiers:	
Agree	53
Disagree	29
H. In terms of rights and wrongs, how do Calley's actions compare with bombing raids that also kill Vietnamese civilians:	
Similar	56
Different	32

Hunting

Sighting down the long black barrel,
I wait till front and rear sights
Form a perfect line on his body,
Then slowly squeeze the trigger.

The thought occurs
That I have never hunted anything in my whole life
Except other men.

But I have learned by now
Where such thoughts lead.
My mind soon passes on
To chow and sleep
And how much longer till I change my socks.

—*W. D. Ehrhart*

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The GIs at Firebase Pace are among the last remaining combat troops in Vietnam. Ordered by their officers to go on a "suicide mission," the GIs of Bravo Company refuse to go. Under what circumstances, if any, do soldiers have the right to refuse direct orders from their superiors?

The Grunts of Firebase Pace

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The following selection was written by Richard Boyle, a journalist covering the Vietnam war from 1965 to 1971. Although not a soldier, Boyle sided with the men at Firebase Pace and did his best to make their situation known to the outside world.

THE GRUNTS OF FIREBASE PACE

From the air, Firebase Pace looked like an ugly square brown scar carved out of the thick green forest.

It sat astride Route 22, a muddy unpaved road, and was surrounded by several sections of barbed wire, rocket screens, and an outer trench system three sandbags deep. Even with this protection, the one hundred artillerymen manning the two eight-inch and two 175-mm guns had suffered nearly 35 percent casualties in the first two weeks of the North Vietnamese offensive.

There were also indications that relations between South Vietnamese [ARVN] and Americans at Pace were none too friendly. A heavy layer of barbed wire plus sandbagged defenses separated the two compounds.

When I arrived at the base I introduced myself at the tactical operations center to the first sergeant. Then I met Capt. Robert Cronin, who commanded the company of ground troops sent to protect the artillery

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from Richard Boyle, Flower of the Dragon: The Breakdown of the United States Army in Vietnam, Ramparts Press, 1973.

at Pace (although, according to MACV*, there weren't any American ground troops there). We had a friendly discussion and he briefed me on the military situation at the base.

Cronin was facing a tactical, possibly a political, dilemma. The North Vietnamese had built an extensive underground bunker complex inside the treeline along the Cambodian border, on Pace's northeastern side. From these bunkers, NVA gunners would quickly set up a mortar tube or rocket launcher, fire, and duck back into their tunnels. Within seconds the Americans would pour out machine-gun fire, followed by artillery and even air strikes; but by then the gunner would have jumped into his gopher hole and scurried through an underground tunnel, emerging about fifty meters away.

All the artillery and air fire the Americans poured on the North Vietnamese seemed useless. The battlefield technology developed by the Americans, representing billions of dollars—electronically controlled B-52s, Spooky gunships which pour out enough machine-gun bullets in a few seconds to fill up a football field, and all the other gadgets—seemed useless against a few men with a mortar who could pop up at will, drop in a few rounds, and duck back into the safety of their tunnel with virtual impunity. The electronic battlefield, the pride of the American military establishment, was being thwarted by troops using the same kinds of mortars used in the First World War. Cronin knew it, his superiors knew it, and his troops knew it.

Somebody had to go out and get those North Vietnamese bunkers, or within a day, maybe two, the enemy mortar and rocket positions would multiply faster than the rats who were also fighting the Amer-

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*MACV: Military Assistance Command—Vietnam. MACV ran all United States military operations in Vietnam.

icans for domination of Firebase Pace. When the North Vietnamese had enough fire-power to knock out the camp's big guns, they would rain a deadly barrage of fire on the Americans, covering a sapper attack.* And that would be it.

Lt. Col. Robert J. McAffee was the operations officer for Firebase Pace, the honcho. He was very military. He stood proud and erect. McAffee didn't stay in Pace at night; he commuted daily in his own chopper.

"Hi, Colonel," I said. "Can you give me your appraisal of the situation here?"

He said we were "clobbering them, and clobbering them good. We got fifteen hundred bodies."

"That's interesting, Colonel," I said. "How do you know?"

*sapper attack: attack by soldiers specially trained in blowing up bridges and military targets.

He said patrols were sent out to count the bodies. I didn't tell him that during the three days I spent with the ARVN in Cambodia I didn't see anybody going out to count bodies.

"Thank you, Colonel," I said.

From Pace we could see the endless parade of ARVN wounded limping back up Route 22. There was a relief convoy trying to fight its way north on 22, but it was still a long way away. The North Vietnamese had the base surrounded.

None of this was ever reported at the five o'clock follies*, and the press was telling the American people that the battle was over, a victory for the Allies.

MACV didn't even admit that Cronin and his men existed, at least not at Pace. To knock out the North Vietnamese positions which were blasting the base from the Cambodian side of the border, Cronin would have needed at least four companies. But politically, America couldn't afford another Hamburger Hill.† If four companies that didn't even exist were suddenly wiped out, the flak raised in Congress would be horrendous. The brass would also be hard pressed to explain how four companies got zapped in a battle that had already been won. Once again the military had to compromise between political and military necessities.

To do nothing would be to invite military and political disaster. Unhindered, the North Vietnamese would obliterate Pace, and America in the fall of 1971

*five o'clock follies: news reporters' skeptical name for the news briefings given by the military.

†Hamburger Hill: an area that was captured at the cost of many lives and then abandoned. This incident, which was highly publicized, caused outrage among many Americans.

could not stand a Dien Bien Phu,* no matter how small. Without Pace, Tay Ninh would be vulnerable; if Tay Ninh fell, Saigon would be next.

That afternoon Cronin got the word from McAffee. Fifteen men were to go out. Fifteen men against the North Vietnamese 208th Regiment.

I walked over to the grunts [foot soldiers] sitting on the sandbags.

"What are you, man—CID [Central Intelligence Division]?"

"No, I'm a reporter."

We sat on the sandbags, looking out across no-man's land, toward that ominous treeline. We knew the NVA were watching us too, but you can't spend all the time in the bunkers with the rats, you've got to come up for air sometimes.

The first round hit about thirty feet away.

"Incoming!" one of them shouted as we scrambled for machine-gun bunker five.

"Man, that was close."

"Too close."

It was a very personal war there at bunker five. Only a short distance separated us from them; after awhile we felt we knew each other.

"Incoming!"

We dropped to the floor, crouching next to the safety of the bunker wall. That round hit closer than the last.

Nobody saw Hooker get it. He didn't say anything. The blood pumped out of his temple in quick spurts and then flowed down his face, dripping on his shirt. It's amazing how much blood a man has in him.

Hooker slowly touched his temple with a jerky movement and looked at the blood on his fingers.

*Dien Bien Phu: battle during 1954 in which Vietnamese Independence Forces (Viet Minh) defeated the French army.

Then he looked at us. "I'm only twenty-one days short. I don't want to die."

At first no one moved. We just watched the blood squirting out of Hooker's temple. It was like a bad dream in which something is happening but you can't move.

"You're not going to die, Hook," one of them said as he gently laid Hooker down. Then some medics carried him to the medical bunker.

We dove into a safer underground bunker as more shells hit around us. A candle flickered as about eight of us stretched out on air mattresses, hoping the bunker wouldn't take a direct hit from a rocket. Three sandbags may stop a mortar round, but a rocket can cut through a bunker with ease.

We all hoped Hooker would live, but nobody talked about it. We didn't even know how badly he was wounded. Hooker had talked about going home.

"*Whoooeee*, I'm just twenty-one days short today," he had said. Hooker, like all the other grunts, counted off each day left in Nam. Some carved notches on the bunker, others wrote it on their helmets; every man knew how many days short he was. The grunts are scared most when they first arrive and when they're short. The shorter they get the worse it is. They see too many of their buddies get it just before going home. "Charley ain't lettin' you go, man," they'd say.

After about an hour they got bad news; they couldn't get a Medevac* for Hooker because the ceiling was too low for a chopper to land.

"They've picked up mass movements of dinks on the radar," said the sergeant. "Maybe up to four thousand, who knows."

*Medevac: helicopter used to evacuate wounded soldiers.

"Whaddya think they're goin' to do?" one of the grunts asked.

"Who knows, but it don't look good."

Then they got the worst news. "Cronin's sending fifteen men from the Third out at 2100 on a night ambush."

"You gotta be kiddin' me, man," said one of the men to the sergeant.

"They're getting ready now."

After the sergeant left, the men talked about the mission.

"They gotta be insane to send fifteen guys out beyond the burr [perimeter]. Fifteen guys against a whole regiment of dinks."

"If they get hit there'll be no Medevac."

"You can bet the ARVN won't try to help them."

"Most of them guys are newbies, man, they won't know what to do if they're hit."

Al Grana, one of the grunts, didn't say a word the whole time. Then he turned to me.

"Do you really think anybody gives a damn about us?"

"I don't know," I said. "The politicians say they do, but I don't know."

Grana looked at me again. "This is insanity. The whole thing is just insane."

None of the others spoke. Grana continued, speaking softly. "Do you think, if anyone back in the world really knew what was going on here, they'd let this madness continue?"

"I don't know, Al," I said. "I don't think they want to know, not really. It's better for their conscience."

We talked for about an hour. I told Grana and the others that I had become too cynical to believe anything could be done.

"First Hook got it. Next it'll be those fifteen guys from the Third Platoon. Tomorrow it'll probably be us. How many more will it take?" Grana asked me. I couldn't answer.

He looked at me again. "Somebody's got to do something to stop this."

Later in the evening when the shelling stopped we crawled out of the bunker and walked over to machine-gun bunker five. One grunt's mother had sent him a jar of pickled pigs' feet and he was passing them around.

"Somebody oughta give Cronin a pickled pig's foot."

Everybody laughed.

The sergeant who had spoken to us before came over to our bunker in a hurry.

"They ain't goin'," he said.

"What?" asked Al.

"When Schuler was giving instructions, Chris said, "Go do it yourself; I ain't going."

"What did Schuler do?" asked another.

"What could he do?" said the sergeant. "Then five of the other guys said pretty much the same thing."

"Whoooeee!" shouted one of the grunts, giving the clenched-fist salute. Some of them slapped skin palm to palm.

"What do you think they're going to do to them?" one of the men asked the sergeant.

"I dunno. Probably a court-martial."

That night the men of Hooker's platoon decided to hold a meeting in the morning and keep in contact with the other platoons. "We got to stick together," one of them said. "They can't court-martial us all."

Next morning we heard in the chow line that Cronin was drawing up court-martial papers for each of the six men who had refused to go on the night ambush. Refusal of a direct order usually got a grunt five years at Leavenworth [a military prison], and the men of Hooker's platoon were talking about it.

Hooker still hadn't been evacuated, although everybody now knew he would be all right. He came over to say good-bye after breakfast.

Later in the morning Grana and I walked over to the Third Platoon's bunkers.

The six that had refused were scared. From the day a GI takes the oath until he is discharged, he is a cog in the green machine. The lifers* run his life, and they keep power by letting the GI know that no matter what he does the Army will always have the last word.

The lifers knew they couldn't have an army in which the men decided when and if they wanted to fight. The only way they could keep discipline—and the six men knew it—was to come down hard and make an example of offenders. In the Army's book of crimes, refusing to go into combat is one of the worst. If the brass let the grunts get away with refusing to fight, the entire system would face collapse. As soon as other units learned what had happened at Pace, they too would refuse orders.

Chris was scared the most.

"Cronin said he wants to see me," he said.

"Good luck," I told him.

About thirty grunts were standing around talking when I got back to bunker five. Something about them was different. They were the same men I had seen the day before, but somehow they were different.

"Hi, Al, what's up?"

"We just had a meeting with some of the guys in other platoons. We ain't goin' to let the lifers do it to Chris and the others."

"What are you going to do?"

"First of all, we ain't going to go out beyond the burr. We were ordered to go out on a patrol by Cronin, but nobody's going. And we had a vote. We ain't lettin' the lifers mess over those guys."

"Right on," said a couple of other grunts.

"Remember when we talked last night?" Grana said. "Do you think we could get just one senator back in the world to really listen to us?"

What, he said, if the men of Bravo wrote a petition to a top U.S. senator telling him what was really

*lifer: career soldier.

Sp4 Chris Panoutsieos (one of the original six who refused to move out) being questioned by the company commander and an artillery major. Chris has his back to the camera.

happening at Pace? Would it do any good? Would anybody listen?

There was a lot I didn't have the heart to tell them. Every senator has a huge staff of aides, as many as forty, some of whom do nothing but screen mail. The odds of a powerful senator ever even seeing their petition would be one in a thousand.

The men of Bravo had another problem. Officially they didn't exist. They weren't even allowed to send out mail: if the American people knew U.S. troops were being ordered into the Cambodian border area, the brass could face a storm of protest both

from Congress and the people. So the grunts could be overrun by the North Vietnamese or court-martialed before their petition even got out.

"Who are you going to write it to?" I asked Grana.

"We talked about that, too. Do you think Ted Kennedy would listen to us?"

"Yeah; I think so." I couldn't say no. "You know, man"—I hesitated for a second, because I knew Grana was thinking the same thing—"the lifers will never let that petition out of here. Rebelling grunts, facing death, sending a petition to Ted Kennedy—that's a scenario the Army brass wouldn't like to see. They're going to come down on you real hard."

"I know," he said. "It was just an idea."

There was only one way to be sure Kennedy would get the grunts' petition, and that was for someone to take it to him in person. I was the only one at Pace who could do it, and we both knew it.

But I didn't want to. Once the lifers knew I had the petition, they would probably try to keep me at Pace until they decided what to do. They had all the helicopters; it would be a long walk to Tay Ninh. Even if I did get through, I could be picked up on the way to Saigon. My press card had run out and I was now in the country illegally. They could arrest me and there was nothing anybody could do about it.

"The chances of you guys pulling this off aren't very good," I finally said.

"I know. But somebody's got to try," he said, looking at me.

"Anyway, my chances of ever getting your petition to Kennedy are slim. The Army may try to cover up the story, the press will call me an ego-tripper, and I doubt if I'll ever get past Kennedy's palace guards."

Grana said nothing.

"Okay," I said, "I'll try it."

I'll never forget their look of hope when the men of Grana's platoon started passing the petition. It passed quickly to other platoons.

There was now a sense of comradery in Bravo Company. They were all in it together and felt a growing solidarity. Maybe two years before they would have fragged* McAffee; now they didn't have to. They didn't even hate him. "I just feel sorry for the lifers," one of the grunts said. "They just don't know where it's at."

As the hours passed and the men got more signatures on their petition, McAffee and the other lifers were losing more control of the unit.

*fragged: refers to attacks on officers by their own men, using a fragmentation grenade.

Men in bunker five sign the petition.

They had to regain that control, and soon. McAffee sent Cronin to bunker five. When Cronin entered the bunker, the men turned away, ignoring him. "I want you all to get shaves and clean up," he demanded in a military voice. Still the men ignored him. Then he grabbed a rifle and opened the bolt. "This thing is filthy," he said.

"Who needs this," said one of the grunts, and walked out. The rest gradually left, one by one, until Cronin was alone with one man, trying to inspect his rifle.

After Cronin left, the men returned. "We ought to do something about him," one said.

"He's not worth it," said another. "We've got more important things to worry about."

"Yeah—like what about the dinks?"

From bunker five we could see out over the tops of the bunkers across the several hundred meters of no-man's-land to the forbidding treeline where they were waiting. They hadn't fired all morning, but every man knew they were watching.

"I wish we could let them know we have nothing against them," one of the grunts remarked, looking out over his M-60 machine gun. "We just want to get out of here."

"Hey, maybe they know what's going on. They haven't fired today."

"Full," said another grunt. "How could they know?"

"I don't know. But they can see us and they can see we ain't doing anything to them. Maybe they'll lay off."

"Yeah," said another. "If we lay off them, maybe they'll lay off us."

The men agreed, and passed the word to the other platoons: nobody fires unless fired upon. As of about 1100 hours on October 10, 1971, the men of Bravo

Company, 1/12, First Cav Division, declared their own private ceasefire with the North Vietnamese. For the first time since they got to Pace, it was all quiet on the Cambodian front.

Now there were no longer two sides at Pace, there were four—the lifers; the South Vietnamese, who seemed almost to be spectators; the North Vietnamese, possibly massing for a final attack; and the grunts, who, like the ARVN, were opting out. To the grunts, it wasn't the North Vietnamese who were the enemy, it was the lifers.

Grana came back from the meeting with the other platoons and reported that they now had over 50 percent of the company. They were bordering on open mutiny. The only thing that could save them now was public opinion.

"What if they try to cover this up, say it never happened?" Grana asked me.

"It's very likely," I said.

"They'll simply say it never happened. How can you have a revolt in a unit that doesn't exist? They'll say I'm crazy, or that I made the whole story up. When it comes down to it, who do you think they'll believe," I asked, "—me, or the U.S. Army?"

"But we've gone too far. There must be a way to let the people back in the world know the truth about what's really happening here."

"Hey, man, wait a minute," said one of Al's buddies. He came back with a portable tape recorder.

"Now they can't say it didn't happen," said Al.

This is Richard Boyle on October 10, 1971, at Firebase Pace about two kilometers from the Cambodian border sitting in a bunker with about a dozen grunts of the First Cav Division. Last night they were ordered to go into night ambush . . . several of the men refused to go and none of the fifteen in the patrol wanted to go. This morning several of the men were told they would be court-martialed for . . . what is that for, Chris? What did they tell you you'd be court-martialed for?

For refusing a direct order.

For refusing a direct order. The other platoons, the Second and First, were angered at the fact that the Army picked out a few men to punish. And now several of the men from the Second and Third platoons are in this bunker. What happened?

When we first came here they told us our mission and that was to be on a defensive; but night ambush is an offensive role. And it's plain suicide going out there in the middle of the night.

It's plain fact that the NVA have been mortaring us every . . . you know, every day. And they hit us with . . . one guy got . . . in John's squad there, one guy got wounded in the shoulder and in the head yesterday by a rocket.

Right in this bunker.

A lot of the people are kind of wondering if anyone back in the world knows that we're out here, you know. Like they say that only two batteries artillery are supposed to be here but no grunts are here. We don't even exist. We're just meat.

I heard that your platoon may go out tonight.

Right. The Second Platoon is supposed to go on night ambush.

Are you going?

No.

The Second Platoon is not moving from their bunker.

Fact is, they might lay off, they haven't shot any today.

"They say . . . no grunts are here. We don't even exist. We're just meat."

Do you think you'd be alive if you went out last night?

No, man.

If you go out there at night, say you take thirty or forty men, they'll never find you no more. That'll be the last they see of you, once you walk off this firebase. 'Cause if they can't go out there to get those dudes out of that chopper that crashed about four days ago, they ain't going to go out there looking for you in the jungle, man.

What'd they tell you this morning, the captain and the lieutenant?

Well, he says not to talk to the press.

He called us in one at a time, man, trying to—

He said not to talk to the press. He said the strike wasn't called off 'cause we refused to go; he said it was because ARVN was out there. He said we was goin' out today.

Are you going out today?

That's what he said.

I'm not going out today.

I know they told you not to talk to the press, but did they tell you they were going to court-martial you?

He told me he'd give me time to think about it. I told him, man, I've thought about it all the way over here. I wasn't goin' to jeopardize my life. Nine times out of ten I got a good chance of not coming back.

I just been in the country three weeks. They try to say the old guys influenced me. When I been here for three days I saw what's goin' on for myself. It's suicide going out there. ARVN comes back all messed up, no arms, no legs. And they want us to go out there.

Sixteen men go out there at night. We don't know what's out there, could be booby traps, could be anything. We don't know.

Let's face it: if B-52 bombers can't knock 'em out, and napalm can't knock 'em out, what are we going to do?

What can fifteen men do?

They could see us, but we can't see them. They could see us leave and just wait. Once we get outside they can come in behind us, cut us off, then get us from the front and back. You can't call for air support, 'cause it won't come in here.

We're not mad just because of this, though; we're generally mad.

Back home the people don't know what the hell's going on, either. They're just deceiving the people.

You think the people don't know the truth of what's going on here?

People that go home on leave [say] everybody says, How's things back in the barracks over in Vietnam? What barracks? We sleep out on the ground.

We're not supposed to be fighting this war anyway. We're supposed to be turning it over to them.

You can tell they don't have their hearts in it, man. They're being pushed out there and they come running right back.

Do any of the people back in the world know that [Defense Secretary] Melvin Laird said something to the effect that our combat role had ended? And the fact was we were still in the bush, man, when he said that.

Seven people got hurt one day in an ambush and that was the day it [Laird's statement] was in the newspaper.

Yesterday when Hooker got it in this very same bunker it didn't seem like combat was over.

He [Cronin] was talking about the reputation of the company. He said that if we talked to the news media and told what was going on, the news media would distort it and twist it up, and would destroy our company reputation.

Our company reputation don't mean anything.

They told me last night they were bringing in a battalion of ARVN some time today. They was supposed to be operating in this area. Okay, if we refused our mission last night, then why can't the ARVN go out on that patrol today? Why is it necessary to send the platoon out there?

'Cause the lifers want to get the body count. They don't give a damn if it's GI bodies.

Well, look here. Why are you over here?

Everybody over here don't know why they're over here. It's not accomplishing anything. I mean, you see what you do. Have you ever accomplished anything out in the bush? You go out there and you make contact, but do you accomplish anything really? Every time you go out, the same—

We aren't rebelling just against going out on night ambush. We're rebelling against the whole situation, being stuck out here.

Do you think you're fighting for democracy here?

How can it be a democracy with a one-man election?

Yeah, what kind of democracy is that?

Everybody knew what it was about. Everybody knew that election was phony.

It's always the higher highers, man, *they* don't have to go out there. They just send *us* out there. They get to sit back here and talk.

It's easy to tell someone to do somethin', but it's a different story when you have to go out there yourself.

Just playing games out there.

Playing with human lives.

Another thing, man. I brought some peace shirts back to the guys, and the NCO [noncommissioned officer] won't even let us wear them just 'cause he's against peace.

He calls us hypocrites 'cause we wear peace signs. Like we *wanted* to come over here and fight. Like we can't believe in peace 'cause we're carrying an M-16; that's utterly ridiculous.

I always did believe in protecting my own country if it came to that.

Yeah, if it came down to that, but—

But see, I'm over here fighting a war for a cause that means nothing to me. It means nothin' but my life, and life's a very dear thing to me, man. I have a hell of a lot to go back to.

How do you feel about picking out six guys for court-martial?

It's rotten. They're trying to separate us, trying to keep it from being unified. They know if we're unified they can't do anything.

Just isn't six people that don't want to go out there, they're just trying to blame it on six people.

There's no way you can court-martial the whole company and keep it out of the papers and out of national attention. You can do it with six guys, and no one'll ever hear of it 'cept the *Stars and Stripes.** But if you court-martial the whole company it's bound to get out.

Now we got the petition.

Somebody want to read that, man?

Here, John, read it.

Read it for the tape.

Okay, this is the letter we're sending to Senator [Edward] Kennedy:

> We the undersigned of Bravo Company, First Battalion, Twelfth Cav, First Cav Division, feel compelled to write you because of your influence on public opinion and on decisions made in the Senate.
>
> We're in the peculiar position of being the last remaining ground troops that the U.S. has in a combat role and we suffer from problems that are peculiar only to us. We are ground troops who are supposedly in a defensive role (according to the Nixon administration) but who constantly find ourselves faced with the same combat role we were in ten months ago. At this writing we are under siege on Firebase Pace near the city of Tay Ninh. We are surrounded on three sides by Cambodia and on all sides by NVA. We are faced daily with the decision of whether to take a court-martial or participate in an offensive role. We have already had six persons refuse to go on a night ambush (which is suicidal as well as offensive), and may be court-martialed. With morale as low as it is there will be more before this siege of Pace is over.
>
> Our concern in writing you is not only to bring your full weight of influence in the Senate, but also to enlighten public opinion on the fact that we ground troops still exist. In the event of mass prosecution of our unit, our only hope would be public opinion and your voice.

[Signed by Sp4 Albert Grana and 64 other men—listed in Boyle's book.]

After we finished the tape, Al Grana handed me the petition with the sixty-five signatures. It was two-thirds of the company, more than anyone had suspected. Time was running out. If I was ever to get out of Pace, it had to be now.

Grana shook my hand the way grunts shake hands, clasping the thumb.

"I hope you can make them listen," he said.

"I'll try."

"Good luck."

I shook hands with each of the other men in the bunker the same way.

With the petition and tape on him, Richard Boyle grabbed a ride on a Medevac helicopter and made his way to Saigon. He turned his story over to a reporter for Agence France Presse rather than to an American news agency so that it would not be suppressed. Soon the mutiny was world-wide news, although many U.S. newspapers refused to mention it.

Once the story broke, Boyle was in danger of being arrested by Thieu's [the head of the South Vietnamese government] police. Fortunately other newsmen were able to quickly pull some strings and get him on a plane

*Star and Stripes: the United States Army—sponsored newspaper for American servicemen in Asia.

the United States. When he got to San Francisco, Boyle learned that the story had gotten bigger than ever. As he summarized it:

"Senator Kennedy had publicly called for an investigation of the incident at Pace. The Army then pulled out all the men of Bravo Company, sending in Delta Company to replace them. The men of Bravo were sent to Firebase Timbuktu, to the rear, and were now out of danger. None of the men would be court-martialed. The Army had backed down.

"A few days later, the men of Delta Company heard about the refusal of Bravo Company. When a Delta patrol was ordered out, twenty men refused to go.

"Then the Army pulled out Delta Company, along with the entire company of artillery supporting the South Vietnamese in Cambodia. The monster guns which fired shells as big as tree trunks over a distance of thirty miles were left at Firebase Pace, spiked so that they would be of no use to the NVA.

"The U.S. Army was in retreat. The grunts had won."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What were the particular circumstances at Firebase Pace that led to the mutiny of Bravo Company?

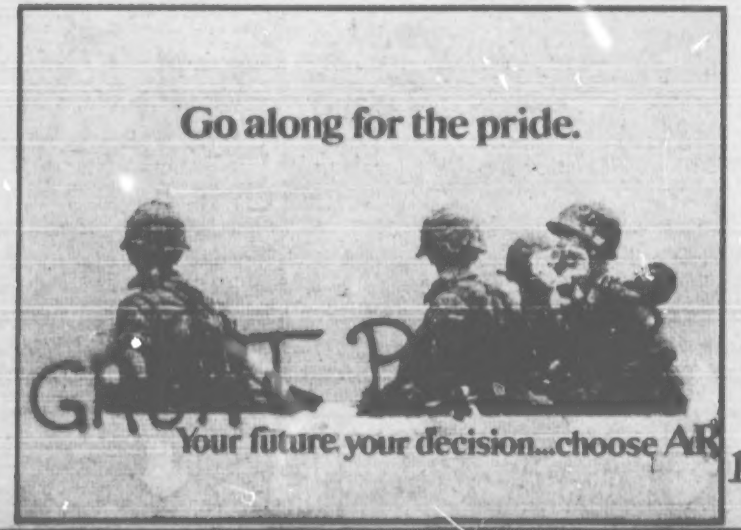
2. Why was their rebellion successful?

3. How does their action compare with Rick Springman's refusal to fight?

4. What was the press told about the situation at Firebase Pace?

5. Explain why you would or would not support press censorship of this story if you were:
   - A lifer at Firebase Pace
   - A grunt in Bravo Company
   - A general in the U.S. Army
   - A U.S. congresswoman or man

6. Did the men of Bravo Company have the right to disobey their officers in your opinion? Explain.



A Sunday Afternoon Pickup Game

A Sunday afternoon
pickup game,
just ten guys
taking a break from the war

Nobody seemed to mind
the crooked, homemade hoop,
the thick dust,
or the volleyball

Overtime! A tie game,
and in the excitement
of trying for another bucket
killing was forgotten

But before we could
finish the game
a lone mortar round
wiped out half the players

The final score
for the day:
The VC – 5
The U.S. – 0.

—Larry Rottmann

This essay from Vietnam and Black America was written during the 1960's when demands for civil rights and Black Power were sweeping the United States. Gerald (Snead) Bayete raises the question: what does it mean to be a Black man serving with the Army in Vietnam?

Gerald Snead Bayete

Gerald (Snead) Bayete

GERALD (SNEAD) BAYETE

Before going home on leave, all of us destined for the Nam had to go to indoctrination classes every day. Since my MOS* was that of a clerk, I was not forced to go through a lot of the rigorous combat training that soldiers in the infantry and artillery had to endure, so, basically, all that was required of me was to know how to shoot a gun, throw a grenade, and take orders unquestioningly. However, these indoctrination classes were supposed to inform us about why the United States was in Vietnam and a little bit about the Vietnamese culture, along with some information about what we were up against. We were told that the United States was there to stop the threat of Communist aggression and that if we pulled out, all of Indochina would fall to the Reds. Film clips were shown of dismembered bodies and burnt-out villages, and, of course, these acts had been committed by the North Vietnamese. Then we were told how sometimes

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Gerald Snead, "Vietnam: A Brother's Account," from Vietnam and Black America, Clyde Taylor, editor. New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1973.

*MOS: Military Occupational Skill; the job you have been trained in.

the Vietcong (VC) strap bombs to kids who work on the military bases so they can walk into the area and blow up American soldiers. We were warned not to trust anyone with slanted eyes, because "the gooks are very sneaky." It seemed to me I had heard a similar phrase before—somewhere. The lectures on their culture were very informative; it wasn't safe to eat their food, and Buddhist monks were maniacs who worked with the VC and burnt themselves in public.

We had to listen to this stuff over and over in different forms for a period of about two weeks. It did leave me with a slightly paranoid feeling. Not that I believed everything they told me; that didn't matter too much. The Army doesn't expect you to actually believe everything that is said; all they want you to do is acknowledge any element of truth among those lies, the fact that these things do exist. There are burnt-out villages, dismembered bodies, and kids blown up carrying bombs. Who commits these acts doesn't matter, because in a war, atrocities are committed on both sides. The point I'm trying to make is that after repeatedly being shown these pictures of atrocities, which represented the element of truth, then surrounding that truth with "white" lies, you begin to associate the two; when thinking of one, you think of the other, very much like a TV commercial. You watch the commercial and the element of truth is the product they're trying to sell; it does exist. They then surround the product with ridiculous words, catch phrases, and actions that usually have nothing to do with the quality of the product. Most of the time, we know that it's nothing but bull, but after seeing it time and time again, we begin to remember the product by the commercial. The two exist as one, so upon entering a store, we are more likely to pick up something familiar, not realizing that the familiarity was brought

about by the commercial. We then pick the product off the shelf. It's all related and very effective. After these lectures ended, I left for my 30-day leave. A month later, I left Oakland bound for Southeast Asia.

Our plane landed at the airport in Bien Hoa amidst blistering heat. The temperature seemed to be over a hundred degrees. We were loaded on buses that would take us on a five-minute ride to Long Binh, which was the replacement station.* From there, we would be sent to our assigned units.

The first thing that caught my attention while waiting for my bags at the airport was the Vietnamese. They were the ones unloading the plane, carrying the bags to where we were waiting. All during which, the American soldiers who were supervising (of course) ordered them to hurry up while making derogatory remarks about Asians in general. I thought about the airports and train stations in the States, where menial jobs such as baggage carrying are handled by the brothers, who must take the same devil's abuse in order to provide for their families. It disgusted me.

I remained in Long Binh for a couple of days and was then sent to Saigon for duty. Arriving in Saigon with the help of a brother who fixed up my orders, I was assigned to a maintenance detachment of the First Logistical Command. The detachment's work location was one of the many warehouses that lined Saigon Harbor. I became the company clerk, which consisted of maintaining the personnel and work-order records for the detachment while handling all the

*Replacement station: military station where incoming and outgoing personnel are processed.

typing duties, making sure that our headquarters company in Cam Ranh Bay was contacted daily to give our status. Jobwise, I couldn't have gotten anything better. There were so few men in the detachment (about twenty-five), that the administrative load was next to nothing. So I spent most of the workday doing crossword puzzles, reading the paper, and looking busy when the situation called for it.

The white soldiers in the detachment resented the fact that I was the company clerk; they didn't like the idea of a niggah handling all their records. After working as a clerk in the States, I learned to sense these things. They didn't give me any trouble, since I was in the position to foul up their paper work, which could delay them in getting a promotion or a transfer, or leaving the country on time. This was the prime reason they didn't like Black company clerks. The officer in charge didn't give me any hassles, I used to cover for him when he was supposed to be in the office and wasn't.

Despite my Army-induced paranoia about the Vietnamese, I was determined to overcome it. After all, why should I be scared of the people just because the United States feared them? America's fear stemmed from her own guilt of knowing that she had wronged every dark country she came in contact with. Why should I share their guilt? Was I equally guilty? I was here in uniform representing them. If my throat was cut one night by a Vietnamese, wouldn't it be totally justified? Wasn't I their enemy, too? But couldn't they understand that I really didn't want to be here, that I had only enlisted in the Army because I didn't know what to do with myself and that Vietnam was an alternative for me? Alternative? What alternative did they have? These peasants-soil people/earth people/yellow people—Black people (?), who for

the past hundred years had watched country after country invade their land and slaughter men, women, and children for their own selfish gains while telling them that they hadn't developed enough to choose their own form of government. Yeah, what alternative did they have? All these thoughts were going through my mind, and although I tried to rationalize my position, deep down inside I knew it was wrong for me to be there. What it boiled down to was the cold fact that I had chosen to assist Uncle Sam in carrying out his devilish deeds instead of going to jail. All that lay ahead of me was survival; I was determined to survive.

I began talking to the Vietnamese at every available opportunity, with the purpose of learning all that was possible about their country, their life, and their feelings about all that was happening there and abroad. After getting off work, I would either walk, or catch a local taxi and ride, all over the city, familiarizing myself with the country and the people. I learned that the Vietnamese, on the whole, respected the Black soldiers more than the white ones. They understood how our plights were related. After all, we did have a common enemy.

The white soldiers were apt to get charged higher prices than brothers when buying something from the Vietnamese. If they wanted to sell something to the Vietnamese, they were more likely to be given less than a brother could get. This is not to say that the Vietnamese wouldn't hustle brothers and vice versa, just as it would be false to say that brothers don't hustle brothers. It's just that when they ran a game on one of those country white boys, it was like running a game on a fool; after all, what can a backwoods redneck know about the street life? There were even parts of the city where we could go and they couldn't without fear of being robbed or murdered.

A lot of times, the Army would retaliate by making these places off limits to all GIs. These off-limits areas served a double purpose; they protected the white GIs and gave the MPs a legitimate reason to bust brothers, since we went there whether we were supposed to or not. In fact, at one time they made a whole beach off limits. It just happened to be the place where all the brothers used to hang out. The reason given was too much dope in the area.

There were some brothers who tried to identify with the red, white, and blue. They felt that they were in Nam to protect democracy, and therefore despised the Vietnamese with the same fervor as the white man despised us. They were catching it from all sides, getting hustled not only by the Vietnamese and the white soldiers but by the Black soldiers as well . . .

Since our company clerk had not seen much of anything all his life, he posed no threat to the NCOs [noncommissioned officers]. This in turn made them feel comfortable to talk freely with him. They played on his naivete to boost their egos, telling him of battles they had fought and foreign women they had conquered. After a few beers or a bottle, they would begin to talk about the "niggers" in the detachment—which ones they could tolerate and which ones they couldn't, which ones they were going to try and pin something on, and which ones they could possibly use to find out things about the others. What they didn't know was that the clerk didn't like lifers either. Maybe because of their paternalistic attitude, their reminding him of why he left home to join the Army, or maybe he had discovered some of the bigotry and hatred in his people's culture. Whatever his reasons, he'd tell me parts of their conversations that wouldn't embarrass him too much. At the same time, other brothers in the detachment would be picking up information here and there, and whenever we got together we would compare notes and see what was valid and what was not. All this was necessary, because we knew that they would prefer not to have any Black men in the company.

One brother was sent back to headquarters because he got into a fight in a bar. He was considered detrimental to the company. Another brother and myself were given Articles* for refusing to let a sergeant sit in the front seat of a truck. It was during the off-duty hours, and we were getting ready to go downtown. We were sitting in the front seat with the driver. The sergeant, who was not in uniform, demanded that we get out and let him sit with the driver. We refused

*Articles: Article 15, form of disciplinary action where you were usually given two weeks' restriction and extra duty along with a fine, and maybe a reduction in rank.

and consequently were given fines along with two weeks' restriction and extra duty. The other man was supposed to be going home, but they made him stay in Nam a little longer to serve out his extra duty. Promotions were given to brothers only up to a certain pay grade, on some technicality that usually didn't apply to white soldiers in the detachment. Two or three other brothers were sent to one of our units near Da Nang along with a few uncooperative white men (niggah sympathizers) in the company. There was a lot of combat action in Da Nang.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

1. Gerald (Snead) Bayete says, "I had only enlisted in the Army because I didn't know what to do with myself... Vietnam was an alternative for me." Discuss some of the reasons why someone might have enlisted to fight in the Vietnam war. Why someone would enlist in the volunteer army today.

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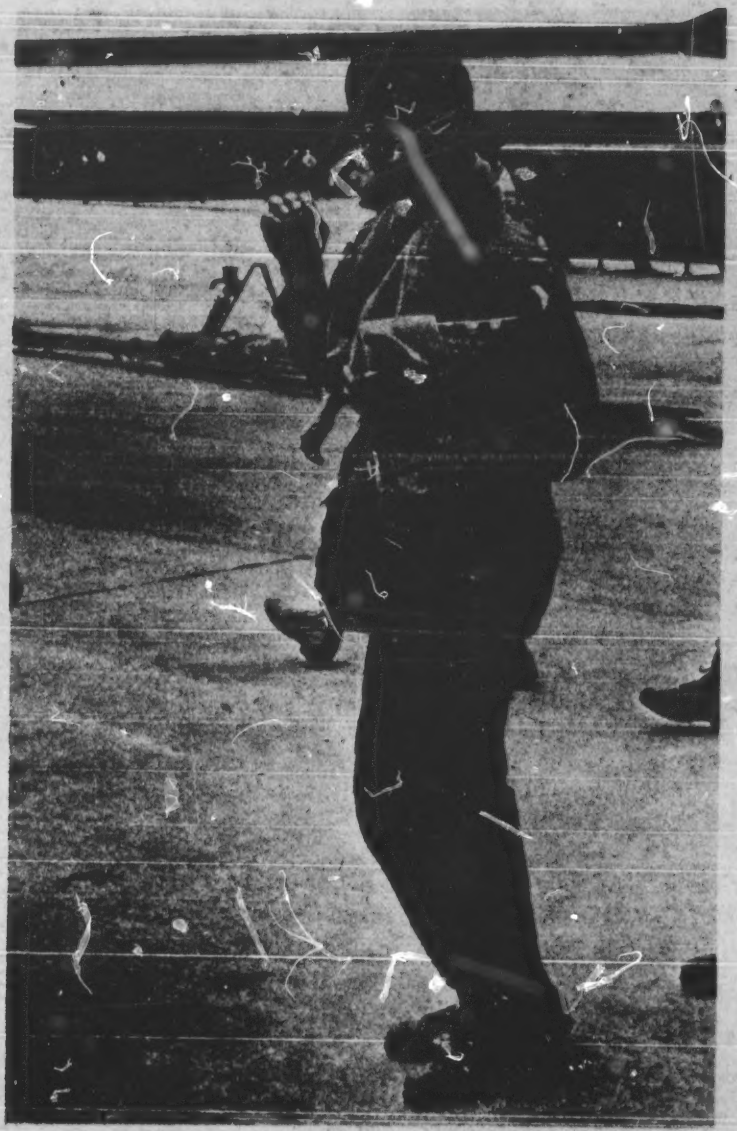
In this essay, also from Vietnam and Black America, David Parks joins Gerald (Snead) Bayete in raising a crucial issue: both authors question whether they as Black men should be fighting "to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they hadn't found in Southwest Georgia or East Harlem."*

David Parks



*from Martin Luther King in a speech called "Beyond Vietnam" in 1967.

DAVID PARKS

January 16, 1967. Uncle Sam sends Care packages every day, with candy, smokes and other little goodies. In that way, we are well supplied. At times, during the lulls, it doesn't seem like we are fighting a war—more like we're just on a long, hot vacation. Charlie doesn't fool around with our tracks when we're out on missions. Too, he's a bad shot, even worse than me.

This is a real poor country. Everywhere you go people are on their knees begging. Some of the Whiteys dig this sort of thing and make a game of it. We're riding along and there's a group of hungry kids. Someone throws a piece of bread on the road. The kids go for it like a pack of wolves. Often one of them gets hit by a track or several get hurt in the scramble. It's a bad scene. You never see a soul do anything like that.

The South Viet people call the Negro soldiers "souls," by the way.

January 31, 1967. The FO's [Forward Observer] job is one of the hairiest in a mortar platoon. He's on more patrols because an FO is required to be with the patrolling squad at all times, and there are only three

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David Parks, GI Diary. New York: Harper and Row, 1967. From Clyde Taylor, editor, Vietnam and Black America. New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1973.

FOs to cover sixteen squads. The odds are against him. Sgt. Paulson hand-picks the men for this job. So far he's fingered only Negroes and Puerto Ricans. I think he's trying to tell us something. I do know he gives me a sour look every time he sees me at the FDC [Fire Direction Control] controls. Every time he comes around I get a feeling that I should have been born white. If only the souls and Puerto Ricans could tell the world what really happens to them in this man's army.

February 2, 1967. Paulson's always telling me that Negroes are lazy and won't help themselves, etc.

Somehow I thought it would be different this time. Especially over here, where survival is the thing. But that seems to cut no ice with Mister Pale. All the souls in the platoon are beginning to gripe, but not enough as far as I'm concerned. Lt. Alden, the platoon leader, usually calls us Negroes "you people." Zerman, a cat from New York, is hip to what is happening, but he's got his own problems. Sgt. Golas changes with the weather. Sometimes he's human. At other times he treats us souls like we are dirt. What the hell. Maybe it's the pressure.

Ten more months of this. These guys bug me more than Charlie. I'm learning one hell of a lesson in here.

February 9, 1967. Just got kicked out of my beautiful FDC job. The good Sgt. Paulson strikes again. He gave me the news with a smile. I am now Forward Observer Parks, attached to the First Platoon command track. On mission our platoon has to dismount and go after Charlie on foot. And I'm carrying that damn telephone with the antenna, which makes a beautiful target. It's a sergeant's job, but Paulson's not going to promote me.

May 15, 1967. Lot of thinking lately—the people I love, war, sex and what have you. Frankly I'm mixed up. The Stateside news bugs me. On the one hand you have Stokely Carmichael saying Negroes shouldn't be fighting for this country. On the other hand some Negro leaders think just the opposite. I doubt that most of them have ever been to war. One thing's for sure: I have been, and I'm fed up with it. This war is pointing up a lot of my mistakes. It's like the old man kept on telling me, "Champ, it looks like you're going to have to learn the hard way." If I get out of here in one piece, I'm going to be a different man.

Hope to be back with the fellows tomorrow.

May 25, 1967. Rain has brought everything to a standstill, and Bravo is under about ten feet of water. Sometimes I would prefer action to sitting around listening to these officers beat their gums. At times they act like children the way they demand attention. And you'd better jump if you don't want to be out on that firing line. The only way to keep cool with them is to lie quiet. Show the slightest sign of intelligence and you've had it. Especially if you're a Negro. Pratt and Gurney are pretty bright souls. But every time you see them they are pulling a lousy detail while the white cats lie in their bunks enjoying life. A couple of the white guys got so ashamed that they came to the old man today and complained about Pratt and Gurney getting all that harassment. I hope it does some good, but I doubt it.

Sgt. Paulson is detail boss. Capt. Thomas is a good officer and most of the time he treats me OK. But sometimes he forgets himself. I made the mistake of showing him a clipping Deedee sent about Martin Luther King's denouncing the war. "Who the hell does he think he is? Just because he got a Nobel Prize he thinks he can run the wond." He went on, ripping King apart. I said that I thought Dr. King was a man who believed in justice for all people. Then I shut my big mouth. I wasn't in the mood for a night patrol.

August 1, 1967. On Operation Lansing to clear Highway 4 from the Delta to the capital.

Charlie woke us up at 2 A.M. a couple of mornings ago and we have been catching hell ever since. We were to go out on operation against him in a few hours, but he caught us off guard. He threw rocket and mortar fire at us and everything else he had in his arsenal. We scrambled around in the darkness grabbing things we needed to survive or kill with. We finally got onto our tracks and were moving out of base camp when I suddenly realized that this was my last operation. I thought about Harris, Gurney and all the other short-timers. And I began praying I'd make it. I kept praying as we headed for the battle zone where the VC had fired from. And I kept counting the operations and missions I had been on over and over, trying like hell to keep my cool.

We had already called the choppers in when the landing zone unit called saying they were being hit. Thomas gave the word, and we dismounted and moved over to help them. Then bullets started coming from every direction, even from friendly positions. We crawled as we fired, to keep out of the way of our own support. And I was awful thankful for all that crawling they put us through back at Riley. By now the landing zone unit was in bad trouble and Thomas took us on a short cut through the swamp. Muck was waist-deep, but we kept firing as we went.

Then suddenly I was stuck, sinking in. Each

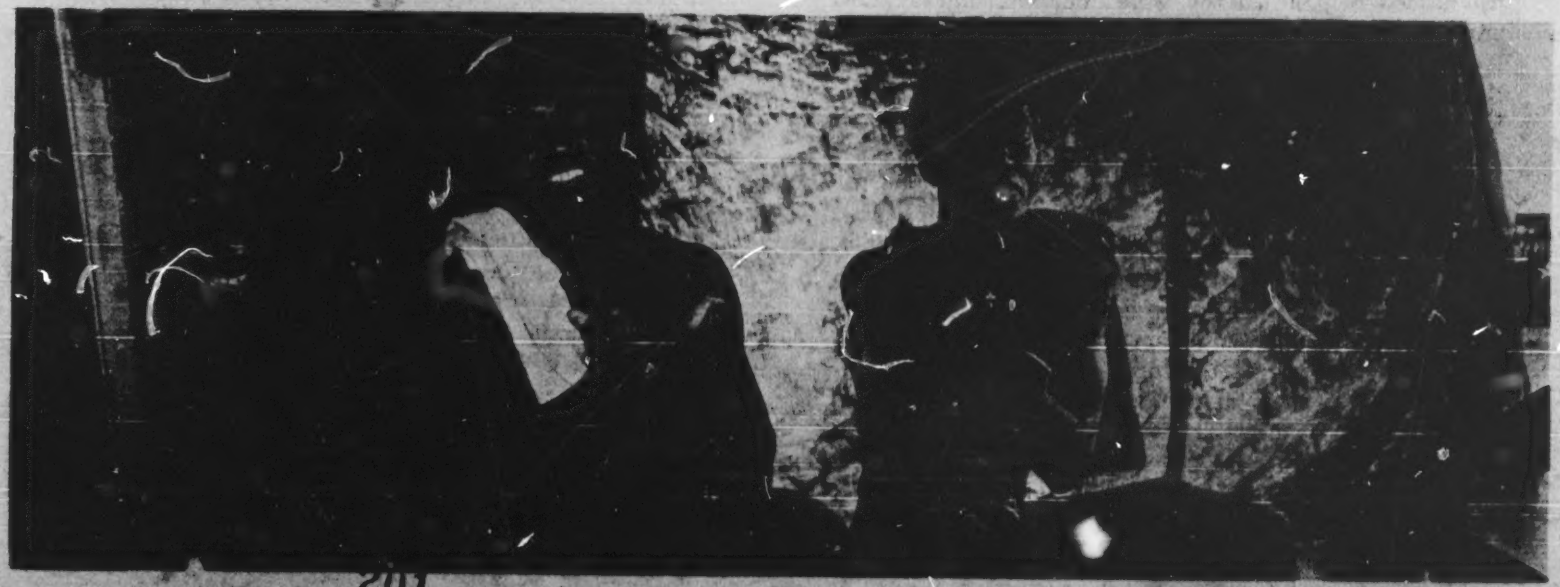
time I tried to pull out I went in deeper. The other guys were leaving me behind, going ahead blasting into the wood line. It was useless to yell for help. No one could have heard me in the noise. The VC were still pouring it into us. Suddenly I felt tired, so tired I wasn't scared any more. I suppose I was giving up. Short-time had caught up with me. Then someone came splashing past. It was that devil Sgt. Paulson. Now he looked like an angel as he extended his rifle, butt first, and hauled me out of that hole. We both kept on moving forward.

By dawn we had the VC surrounded, but they wouldn't give in. There are over two thousand of them in the area and they fought all day. They tried to break through by pounding Charlie Company that evening. A Med Evac chopper had been shot down in the Charlie Company area and ten guys died trying to secure it. The VC knew that this was the weak spot to try to get through, but our artillery wouldn't let them. We listened to the artillery rounds pounding the VC escape route all last night.

Charlie broke through at one point, but he couldn't escape. We're still on his tail. But he knows this country well, and there are plenty of places for him to hide. Right now things have quieted down. The army's set up showers in a little town nearby and all the guys have gone. I'm on radio watch in the track.

August 11, 1967. Got a letter from Deedee today. She's great and I love her. Always writing, sending things to read, food and sweet thoughts. Can't wait to meet her. Read about the riots back in the States in some clippings she sent. They leave me confused, the police brutality and all. It makes me wonder whether we're fighting the right war.

September 9, 1967. I take off for home day after



tomorrow. Yowie!

Just got back from Bravo. The guys were out on the wood line patrolling, so I didn't see them. Several guys got it while I was on R and R [Rest and Rehabilitation]. Don't know exactly who they are. Did see Passmore, who is being transferred to headquarters company. I never liked that guy, but when he walked me to the chopper that was taking me out, I couldn't help feeling some kinship with him. We've been through a lot together. I wished him the best and meant it. He said he hoped he'd see me on the other side and didn't mean it. I could do without that anyway.

The chopper ride back to Zulu is probably the last one I take in Nam. Looking down over the rice paddies I knew so well made me wonder if I had a right to be there. When I came into the army I had no questions, but I am leaving with some. Back in basic they told us over and over again that these people needed help, that they were poor and don't know how to solve their own problems, that we promised them our help, and that we couldn't go back on them. Well, there were times when it seemed we were doing them more harm than good.

I never felt that I was fighting for any particular cause. I fought to stay alive, and I killed to keep from being killed. Now that it's all over there is a funny feeling running through my stomach, when I think of what could have happened to me. When you're in the middle of the fighting, you become strong and do things you didn't think possible. You only think about it afterward. It's hard for me to believe I'm all here and in one piece. Somebody up there is with me after all.

September 13, 1967. Homeward bound. Went across on the thirteenth and going home on the thirteenth. Must be my lucky number. The white guy who sold me my ticket at the airport gave me some really dirty looks. He pitched my ticket at me like I was dirt. There is nothing like the army to make you conscious of such things. The ticket seller reminded me of how some of my white officers treated me. Well, I'm a Negro and I'm back home where color makes the difference. I was feeling good on that plane from Namsville. Thought I'd left all my problems behind. Hell, the new ones will just have to wait. I'm going to enjoy myself for a few days—just knowing Charlie won't be around to wake me up in the morning.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In 1968, Black Americans accounted for 6% of the undergraduate college population. In the same year, Black soliders made up 11% of the United States Army in Southeast Asia and 13% of the deaths. What factors do you think contributed to this disproportion? What were some of the legal ways Americans were able to avoid being drafted?

2. What was going on in Black communities in the U.S. during the late 1960's when these people were writing? Who were Stokely Carmichael and Martin Luther King, and why were they against the war? Why do you think some Black leaders encouraged Black men to fight in the war?

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As a pilot flying bombing missions over Vietnam, Frank Elkins can choose to separate himself from the effects of his bombs. But despite his belief in what he is doing, his journal is full of questions about the morality of his actions and the tremendous emotional costs to himself. How does his position compare to that of combat soldiers like Bruce Anello and Lt. Calley?

Frank Elkins

Frank and Marilyn Elkins

[The following introduction was written by Marilyn Elkins, his wife.]

I had known that my husband was keeping a diary of his experiences as a pilot in Vietnam; he planned to write a novel after he returned and felt that a record of his own immediate reactions to the war would serve as valuable source material. I was not, however, prepared for the large volume which arrived shortly after October 12, 1966, when his name was entered on the list of men missing in action, eight months after our marriage.

My husband was officially neither dead nor alive, and for almost six years I clung to the hope that he would return and use his diary as the basis of a novel.

I have been living in Paris for almost two years, and my frequent visits to the North Vietnamese delegation here have convinced me Frank is dead. I feel that his diary is too valuable to remain unpublished.

Unlike the ground troops who were forced to choose between tangling with the Vietnamese or with the American military, naval pilots were free to turn in their wings at any time and thus eliminate their active participation in the war without fear of stockades, prisons, or court-martials. As a result, each pilot was forced to make almost daily decisions regarding his involvement in the war.

Why then did these men continue to fly? Did their physical separation from their victims separate them from their own humanity? My husband's diary offers at least part of the complex answer. It would be valuable simply for its detailed account of wartime life aboard an aircraft carrier, but it seems to offer much more—a personal look at a man's struggle with the conflicting doubts and pressures of aerial warfare.

Now that the war is over, there will be many retrospective looks at its costs. Journalists will write highly statistical accounts of the price of our involvement, but they will find it more difficult to portray the cost and agony on a personal level. This diary is the recounting of a personal loss.

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from Frank C. Elkins, The Heart of a Man. Edited by Marilyn R. Elkins. New York: W. W. Norton, 1973.

FRANK ELKINS

June 14, 1966, Yokosuka, Japan. I'm daydreaming and thinking too much. A memory of a movie I once saw keeps coming back. It concerned a member of the elite fighting squadrons in the Japanese Air Force who was in on the bombing at Pearl Harbor and fought throughout the war. The thing that hit me was the way he looked at everything when the going was really good in the early stages of the war. Just like me, I mean; itching to get into things, absorbed in ribbons, medals, and glory, unlike old pros and unlike himself as he was later after involvement in the horror of losing.

It's not really like killing, somehow. You just roll in and drop bombs and see material things destroyed, but you don't hear the screams or see the splattering of blood and brains on walls and foliage or smoking metal. I imagine I'll have more to write and dream about that subject after I've actually seen some action. Yet I think it's something that I've always worried about.

June 23, 100 miles northwest of Okinawa. And today we're really off to war. I feel as unprepared as I have ever been. Four days from now we'll be dropping bombs on people; that's difficult to believe. I don't know how I'll feel about it; I hate to even wonder because taking someone's life and then wondering how *you* feel about it is harsh, to say the least.

We'll be flying close air support for ground operations for about a week. This is quite safe, actually, since South Vietnam has no great anti-aircraft system of guns. It's sort of a transition phase, leading up to the more dangerous North Vietnam work. I'm glad, since I'm still not used to the idea.

June 30, 1966, Dixie Station. South Vietnam is beautiful. From the air it looks a lot like Florida, all green and swampy. It's as easy for me to imagine that I'll soon be seeing Gainesville, Florida, as it is for me to picture the dying which must be occurring on that beautiful countryside. There is a redness of the soil that shows even through the foliage, and from the air, this red soil is the only striking difference from Florida.

One of our mission flights will be to set the VC rice fields on fire (we hear that they are short on food for the first time). These operations are appropriately called "Rice Krispie" missions. Cute, eh?

I've been reading too many war novels. I deeply believe in what's happening here, and I don't for a moment think it's not necessary. Still war is legal murder, and dropping bombs is a convenient impersonal way to be engaged. The war on the ground presents additional problems. Men are maimed and hardened and wounded merely by the sight of their own destructive powers, and although I know I'm doing something necessary and striking a blow for the things I'm pledged to defend, I don't like to think what really happens when the bombs land, or worse, what the area looks like after we drop our bombs and leave; I don't want to think that we are committing a monumenizing form of carnage and ruthless slaughter, covering the ground with bloody bodies and misshapen men.

July 1, 1966, Dixie Station. One of the most impressive things about the area where we rendezvoused was the mile-after-mile area of solid lines of craters, undisputedly the work of the Air Force B-52s. You would see a crater, then a space about twice the width of a crater, then another crater, and the line would continue in that pattern for miles. Parallel to that line and close by, there was another line—like rows of corn, or trees in an orchard. They really must have done some careful planning, for friendly villages were fairly close at hand. We had been warned that we must be particularly accurate today, for we were operating very close to a friendly village.

It never occurs to you while you're flying that there are people down there. Barry and I talked about this tonight. The area we hit yesterday was walked through afterward by the cavalry units, and the body count of VC was up around six hundred.

United States Air Force bombs explode on Vietnam's countryside.

Both Barry and I admitted that we feel ashamed that the bombing and shooting doesn't really affect us deeply. The real shame that I feel is my own lack of emotional reaction. I keep reacting as though I were simply watching a movie of the whole thing. I still don't feel that I have personally killed anyone. Somehow the whole experience remains unreal. Have I become so insensitive that I have to see the torn limbs, the bloody ground, the stinking holes and guts in the mud before I feel ashamed that I have destroyed numbers of my own kind? The bombing is right, I think, but who am I? Humans have always decided what is right, and these same humans have sometimes decided later that they may have been wrong. I only hope and pray that I don't change my mind about what I am doing here. I will lose my mind if I do.

Another letter from Marilyn today. She does write good letters. I couldn't have chosen a better life's companion, not anywhere, no better complementary personality, no more outspoken conscience for me.

July 2, Dixie Station. I'm still worrying about those "six hundred dead." Possibly the count is an exaggeration. I won't feel bad, I don't think, as long as I can think of the target as a group of buildings or a supply dump, or a petrol storage area—as long as I can avoid seeing the whites of their eyes, and more important, as long as I can believe that those I do kill, I kill quickly and, to that extent, painlessly.

July 3, Dixie Station. Everyone seems to consider me the pilot that I feel I am. I've raised pure hell in almost every flight I've flown and impressed most of the people with whom I've flown. If there were a who-is-the-best-pilot-in-the-squadron contest, I think

that I would win. I have to continue to prove myself to myself, but as long as I succeed, I guess I'm okay.

I'm mighty undecided about leaving in September. I want to see Marilyn and do all the things we could do, but I would also like to get all the air medals, etc., and more particularly I feel that I need the combat experience. Of course, I am speaking without having flown against enemy fighters, enemy AAAs [anti-aircraft artillery], and enemy SAMs [surface-to-air missiles]. As George Johnson used to say, "Those who want to go are those who ain't been." Now I fall into that group. Still. . . I am undecided. The real advantage I'd like to gain is that extra year of seniority that I would have on my contemporaries by "dragging my feet" and getting an extra year of sea duty.

A flight over central Vietnam.

Independence Day, Dixie Station.

For me flying is just pure fun—danger or not—and I can see how some people consider Navy pilots as members of a refined motorcycle club. Damn, though, I love to fly. I zoomed up a vertical cloud today and in my heart the words of Gillespie's "High Flight" came welling, "Oh I have slipped the surly bonds of earth/and danced the sky on laughter silvered wings."

July 8, 1966. One of the things the Air Force does occasionally is to spray wide stretches of jungle with defoliates which kill the leaves and vines and rob the Viet Cong of their hiding places. When we were flying in the south, we flew over one of these areas and dropped fire bombs on it to set it on fire and maybe smoke out some of the VC. Well, the air is so wet and volatile that when the heat from the fire started rising above the fire, it caused a small thunderstorm right over itself and put the fire out within fifteen minutes. At first we didn't know what was happening, but when we tried it again the next day, it happened again; the heat caused the air to rise and form rain clouds. That's the best example I know of how wet and humid it is in this country.

It was our first day to fly over the north, and I was handed a tanker hop* so I still don't know what the big action is like. Don and Richard went out on the same launch as my tanker and destroyed nine river barges they happened to find.

The staff captain in the War Room explained how the North Vietnamese continue to supply their troops in the south. Three main routes the NVA use are all

*tanker hop: a flight to get fuel from another airplane.

almost directly parallel and within twenty-five miles of each other and run practically the length of North Vietnam. These routes are the railroad, the main highway itself (the one we call "Highway 1-A"), and the coastline waterway. Supply troops carry something by bicycle for a distance, then transfer it to the railroad and run it perhaps thirty miles by rail, then transport it to the road if a railroad bridge is out, or put it on a barge. You can't blow up rivers, and we sink barge after barge and still they come. All this river traffic; junks, barges, flatboats, etc.. are cheaply made, so there's no real problem to replace them. To that extent it's a game of patience; who'll get tired of the war first, a test of endurance.

July 10, 1966.

I hope the professional nature of the war yields results along the lines of steady nerves. For, as Barry says, there's rarely been a war such as this when men could say, "I've had enough," and be sent home the next day. For those of us in the Naval air war in Vietnam, it's a volunteer war. And to that extent, it's a professional war. At the same time, it would be extremely difficult to turn in your wings and quit, even if you were afraid for your life, in the company of those with whom you've never been a quitter before.

Back to the action at hand. The skipper's flight just returned. All bombs were delivered with good results on the railroad yard, and the other flight knocked out the pile driver on the construction site, a bridge, and scored a direct hit on a flak site with secondary explosions galore. Everybody's happy!

Area in Vietnam before and after defoliation.

July 11, 1966.

Tonight I blew a bridge out on one of the main highways and destroyed about six barges; at least I'm convinced they were barges. I could work myself into an emotional problem if I let my mind wander into the possibility that they might have been family fishing junks. But they were flat and covered with canvas and out on one of the main canals and appeared to be hauling freight. I'm glad that most people I talk to feel the same as I do about that, any but military targets are taboo. Cdr. White didn't feel that way; I don't think he minded just lofting a bomb into a village any more than he minded dropping a practice bomb on a fake target. I'm sure that we can all mind too much for our emotional health, but I ache when I think of love stories of peasant people, stories of old men and women who but for time and luck would have no part in the dispute for power, when I think of my own life and its twists and turns—and the interruption, sudden and final, that I may be making to make some hapless mistake—a barge? A legitimate military target, hauling aid and supplies to the enemies of what we believe? Or a poor family's home and means of livelihood? I can say again and again that those were military targets, but down deep inside I have to pray that I did right.

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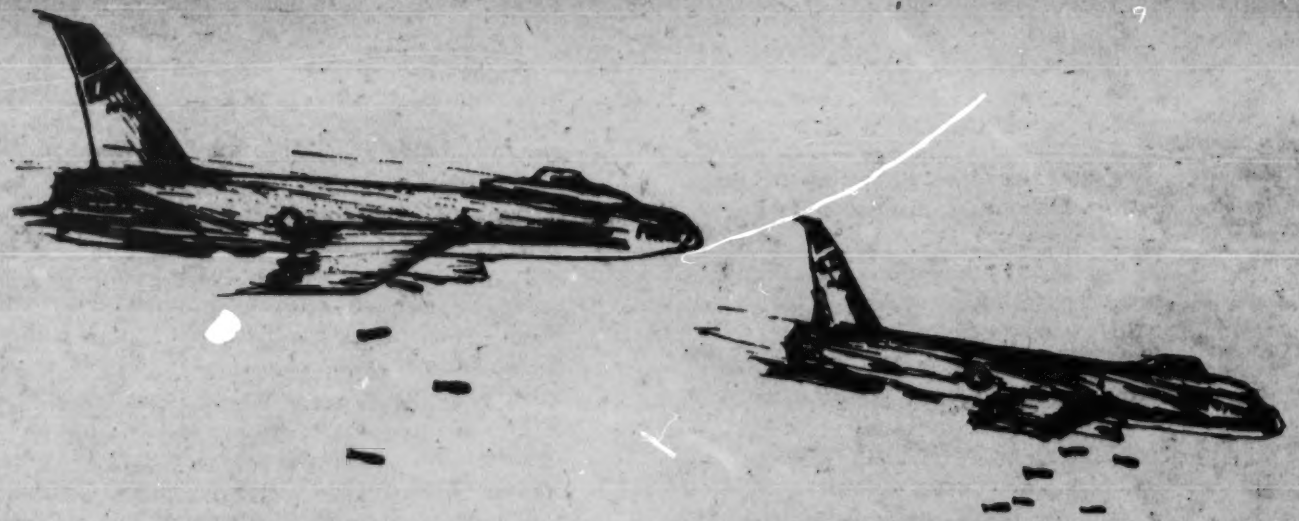


July 15, 1966. This morning I was cool and calm when Bob and I struck the bridge at Qui Vinh, and that was worst of all. It was the first time since the Alpha strike on the oil depot near Hanoi/Haiphong that I had flown a daylight hop, and both my big AGM 126 bullpup missiles went wild as hell and hit off in the middle of nowhere. I was completely cool and calm, and the missiles went crazy. I felt that this was the most futile attempt of all. My hits on the Alpha strike were long and landed in the water. I might as well have stayed home. I seem to get through my strikes at night on pure guts, sweat, tears, and raw chance, and I don't think I've even scared a soul but myself yet. I'm sure rationally that I have, but I can't make myself feel I've been good enough.

Feeling this way gets people killed too, thinking you've got to do well today to make up for lesser hopes, pressing too hard, too low, too long, and being blown out of the sky. I'm fighting this already. I'm just damned determined to hit something useful, to bust up something that'll really hurt, and to do it tonight.

But that Alpha strike tomorrow. As Barry Jones and Jerry say, "My courage diminishes in proportion to the distance inland," and this route takes us right into the heartland where all the SAMs, MIGs [Russian-made jet fighters], flak [bursting shells from anti-aircraft guns], AAA, and population are. High chance of being hit, high chance of hitting civilians, no chance of evasion if you are shot down. And my job is to put down any resistance from the deck with bombs, which means no standoff distance. If somebody starts shooting or firing SAMs, I look down his gun barrel, run head on, and bomb him. Some excitement, eh journal?

Bombed ruins of the city of Dong Hoi in North Vietnam.

July 16, 1966. 21:00 hours. I've been up practically all the time since midnight last night when I wrote the last entry. We briefed at 02:20 this morning, and I led Bob in on a night bombing armed reconnaissance hop. It was so miserably black as we approached the coast that accurate navigation was virtually impossible. Nothing can match the tension of approaching enemy shores with a definite mission, not knowing exactly where you are and not having strict control of your flight. So far, in my own judgment, I've done an excellent job of finding the right target at the right coast-in-point and delivering flares and bombs where I had intended to strike. However, I don't realize, even while I'm flying, how much the flights drain me. I come back to this damned boat, on which comfortable rest is practically impossible in the heat, and I find that my knees are almost too weak to walk. I thought it was fear, and perhaps it was fear at first, but now I'm past giving a damn if they shoot at me. Not past reasonable fear, because I'm still quite rational about the whole thing, and I don't take unnecessary chances especially with the life and welfare of my wingman. However, I'm just becoming aware that the artillery and flak, though I know they're aiming at me and trying to kill me, personally, doesn't intimidate me, and I can fly a good bombing pass and get good hits regardless of looking down a machine-gun barrel.

It's almost impossible to tell how badly you can get to wanting to do some concrete damage which you can look at and say, "There, I did that to you." And to that purpose, night flights are so tremendously exacting as to drain you of every trick, every maneuver, every device for finding an exact position and doing what you mean to do there, without killing somebody and in an orderly fashion becoming a professional soldier. There's

just no way around being keyed up, that's too natural, and besides a man would have to be a fool, and probably soon be a dead one, to be careless and relaxed.

The big thing is this: YOU JUST CAN'T SEE A DAMNED MISERABLE THING. You can't see the coast, you can't see the hills, you can't see the bays, and you can't mark the flak sites, except by pure extrasensory perception. And that's the truth. I've dropped flares when I knew I was "there" without one damned hint to back up this "knowledge," and looked down to see that I was right.

July 18, 1966. I still haven't written Marilyn about having to stay for the whole cruise.* I'm planning to ask her to fly to Manila in early September. The ship will be in port for ten days. I'll ask for leave, and I'll be able to be with her for the period when the ship is in Hong Kong as well—a grand total of three weeks. It'll be a great trip for her, and one we may never get the chance to take again, at least, not for a while.

I almost wish for Marilyn's sake that I had never received the original orders. I'm really torn up inside. I belong here, and the fact that I don't like it and would rather be somewhere else shouldn't matter as much as it does. The skipper's right, but I had dared to hold to the idea of wrapping my arms about Marilyn in September, knowing that I wouldn't have to say good-by for years, and now I have to let that idea go. Having her over here will be expensive, but it will be worth it. Why not? Might be our only chance.

*Originally, Elkins' orders called for him to return to the United States in September; he had just learned that he would have to stay with the aircraft carrier for its entire cruise.

August 5, 1966, en route to Yankee Station. We're returning from a much needed rest. I've spent the last four days swimming, loafing, fishing, and sleeping, trying to get back in shape.

Lots of old friends were in Cubi Point. Gerald Marshall showed up, and I had dinner with him. Gerald has real doubts about our part in the war here and is having a problem deciding what to do. I told him to turn in his wings and get the devil out; he's worthless in his current state of mind. Steve Ellison is his skipper and is as right-wing as anyone can get. If Gerald tries to push for a transfer because of his belief that our involvement in Vietnam is wrong, he may wind up with a court-martial from Cdr. Ellison. His only out is to turn in his wings and that means an end to his flying. Some people who were eating with us were ready to hit Gerald. I just went to bed feeling a little uncertain myself and dejected.

August 24, 1966. One thing that's really difficult about being married to Marilyn is that my attitude is now not as good as it was when I felt that I had nothing really to lose. I enjoy living more than some, and if I'm killed, surely there are plenty who will say, "Too bad," and mean it. But I've never felt that the world would be greatly altered. I've lost that attitude, though it's the best possible frame of mind to be in when you know there's a good chance you won't make it back. It's those who have too much to live for, they're always the ones who get it. And me, I've got too much to live for now. I have to keep my longings and daydreams in check, or I'm afraid I'll lose something that's really necessary to get me through all this.

September 30, 1966 [after visit with Marilyn]. I've had about enough. I'm ready to get back home and set up my life with Marilyn and live like home folks.

... Two months now and we'll be together and, God willing, be together for a long time...

October 11, 1966. Sign on the ready room chalkboard: "Only 30 more Bombing Days till Christmas, get yours done early!"

It seems that we never go into A1 in the morning anymore but what there's another report of a Navy pilot downed. Just every day. Just count them off.

But now, glorious day, we're off the mid-to-noon for a week.

Night before last after I wrote Marilyn, while I was lying in bed for that six hours, I lay there and hated that night hop* and hated that night hop and hated the strain of flying where you have to look in every direction at once and look out for yourself and somebody else and hated the Navy and mostly hated that doggoned night hop and the fact that I couldn't go to sleep so long that the very idea of a whole career in the Navy was so remote to me that I decided that I wanted out of all this, decided that the thing for me to do was go through three years of shore duty and then go back to North Carolina and do something; law, teach, anything, start a business, run the farm, and get out of all this. As far as that period of tossing and turning, rolling, forcing myself to lie still while I took first one hundred deep breaths

*night hop: they had been on a midnight-to-noon schedule.

in one position and one hundred deep breaths in another position in an effort to make my body go to sleep, as far as that four hours went, it was certain that the only thing for me to do was to get out. I thought of all the times when I was growing up, even in high school, that I was afraid of something and took the easy way out, of all the times I was scared and took the coward's way out, of all the times I didn't think I could look the other guys in the face and feel that I was quite the same stuff they were, fights I backed down from, loafing at football practice, loafing on the farm sometimes, or not putting everything I had into any one of a thousand things. I could think of all that, knowing that if I turned in my wings, that I'd have to live all my life in that same feeling of shame, having the medals but secretly knowing that I had given up because I didn't think I had the stuff to keep going when it got rough. And yet, it wasn't quite enough.

I had all that on the one hand, and on the other hand was that damned night hop coming up in the ink black that seems to belong exclusively to the night over here, the uncertainty that the airplane was going to make it into the air off the cat, the terror of not knowing or of having to find the exact right spot to coast in, of having to watch out not only for myself but to coordinate and control, to maintain order, to keep track of that all-important wingman, and to get back and find the ship and make sure that he got back and got aboard, and then to fly that ink-black approach and not break my neck on the ramp or fly into the water or fly into the sea or into a mountain or into the ground and see to it that my wingman didn't.

All these things can be done easily enough taken one thing at a time, but lying in bed knowing that you'll be required to do it all, it all lies on your mind

at once, and you can't sleep and every minute goes by and you know that that's one minute more of precious sleep you lost and need to be safe and get the job done safely and yet you can't sleep and you just lie there and lie there and you can't stop thinking about it all and you toss and it never quits.

Scott and I had a discussion once. We're pretty honest with each other, and the subject of his having to prove himself to himself all the time and my having to do the same thing came up. I remember his laughing once and saying something like, "Well, it's true, I don't believe in myself enough to just say, 'Now Scott, you can do as much or more than anybody else and you don't have to prove a thing,' I've got to show myself." And then he said, "But dammit I do show myself, and do prove things to me and as long as I can keep doing things other folks can't do and things I don't really believe I can do, where's the harm except in the fact that someday I'll fail to prove something—and I've done that before too—where's the hurt if I mange to successfully prove myself?" And I guess that's me over here.

I hate night hops, but almost only when they're the first hop of the day. And every time I walk up on that deck knowing what's coming up, it's like facing death. Hell, more than that, it is facing death; but I think I face it sometimes more heavy-hearted than other folks. I think I'm sometimes more cowardly about it than others, more hesitant. But dammit, I do it. So where's the hurt as long as I manage to get it done?

WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

To: Mrs. Frank Callihan Elkins, Route One, Dunlap, Tennessee

I deeply regret to confirm on behalf of the United States Navy that your husband, Lt. Frank Callihan Elkins, 658100/1310, USN is missing in action. This occurred on 13 October 1966 while on a combat mission over North Vietnam. It is believed that your husband was maneuvering his aircraft to avoid hostile fire when radio contact was lost. An explosion was observed but it could not be determined whether this was hostile fire exploding or your husband's aircraft. No parachute or visual signals were observed and no emergency radio signals were received. You may be assured that every effort is being made with personnel and facilities available to locate your husband. Your great anxiety in this situation is understood and when further information is available concerning the results of the search now in progress you will be promptly notified. I join you in fervent hope for his eventual recovery alive. I wish to assure you of every possible assistance together with the heartfelt sympathy of myself and your husband's shipmates at this time of heartache and uncertainty.

The area in which your husband became missing presents the possibility that he could be held by hostile force against his will. Accordingly, for his safety in this event, it is suggested that in replying to inquiries from sources outside your immediate family you reveal only his name, rank, file number, and date of birth.

Vice Admiral B. J. Sennes, Jr.
Chief of Naval Personnel

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

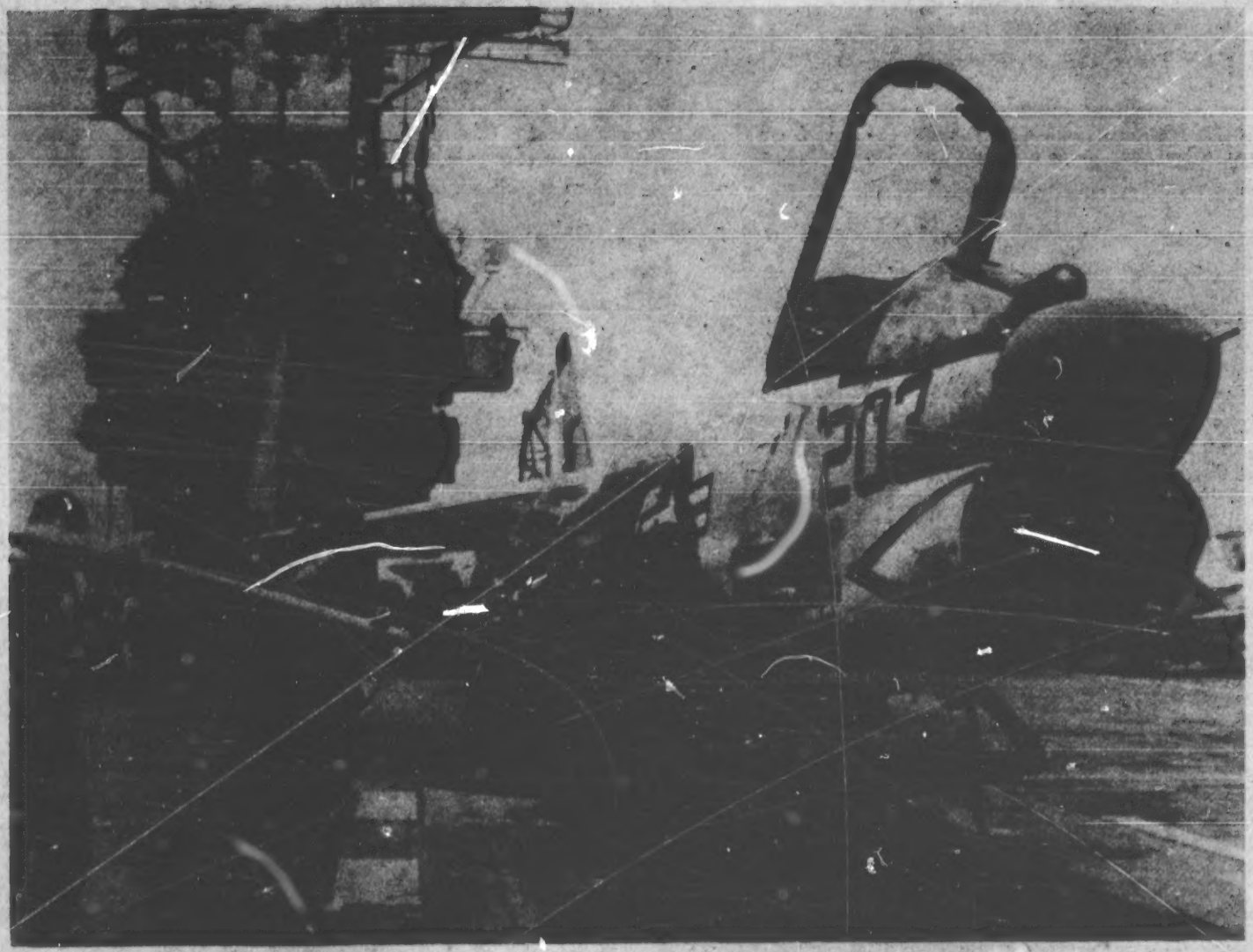
1. Marilyn Elkins in her introduction asks, "Why then did these men continue to fly?" List all the reasons you can think of to explain why Frank Elkins continued his bombing missions. Then list all the reasons that created conflict for him.

2. Reread Elkins' entry on July 11, 1966, where he wonders whether he has hit a military barge or a family fishing barge. How much mechanical control does a bomber pilot have over the targets he hits? If Elkins had hit a fishing junk operated by a family sympathetic to the NLF, would that have been a military target in his judgment? In your judgment?

(According to the Air Force Manual's definition, a military target is "Any person, thing, idea, entity or location selected for destruction, inactivation, or rendering non-usable with weapons which will reduce or destroy the will or ability of the enemy to resist." The Air Force Manual says that attacks on such threats are designed to "dispel the people's belief in the invincibility of their forces, to create unrest, to reduce the output of the labor force, to cause... fear, panic, hunger and passive resistance to the government..."

3. Frank Elkins says, "I have to continue to prove myself to myself." Compare his attitude about proving himself with the attitudes of Rick Springman, Bruce Anello and William Calley.

4. If you were in Frank Elkins' position what conflicts would you feel? Under what circumstances would you turn in your wings? (Remember that he was writing in 1966, when there was little organized opposition to the war.)



Rockets being loaded on a jet fighter on the aircraft carrier "USS Ticonderoga."

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These diaries kept by Vietnamese soldiers fighting with the National Liberation Front give us a glimpse into the feelings of two men fighting for the other side. Both young and newly married, they are torn between their desire to live a full life and their commitment to defend their land, people and way of life. In what ways are the NLF soldiers caught in the same dilemmas as the soldiers they are fighting? In what ways is their situation different?

Unknown NLF Soldier and Le Vanh Minh

Oriana Fallaci, an Italian journalist covering the war in Vietnam, was given these diaries, which were translated by Americans working for the U.S. government. In the introduction which follows, she describes her impressions of the unknown NLF soldier.

Who was he? What did he look like? His name never appears on the pages and he gives us very few facts. It's impossible to give him a face: the only time he describes himself physically is when he says how horrified he was when he looked at himself in the mirror: so worn, so ill. It's only certain that he was a North Vietnamese who had infiltrated into the South through Laos and had joined an ordinary military unit. A Catholic, because he mentions Christmas as a holy feast and calls on Jesus Christ. A young man, certainly, because he hadn't been a soldier for long. Not a peasant though; maybe a chemist, some sort of technician or student. He mentions a research laboratory he worked in before going into the army and he talks of his books and his bookshop. He doesn't seem to be physically strong. The long marches exhaust him, the loads he carries break him, his stomach is always upset. He complains about everything: cold, heat, food, leeches. I can't help imagining him with bony shoulders, delicate hands, fragile wrists and sunken eyes. They're the eyes of a lonely man calling out to the wife he loves passionately; they are also the eyes of a dying man. He died, I think, on the outskirts of Saigon. I wonder where his body lies. In the cemetery at Chi Hoa or in some collective grave flattened out by tanks? I can't bear the thought that he's dead.

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from Oriana Fallaci, Nothing And So Be It, translated by Isabel Quigley. New York: Doubleday, 1972.

UNKNOWN NLF SOLDIER

It is May 1st. I am writing because something very important happened that suddenly changed my life: this morning, at half-past seven, I turned up to report and comrade Lan told me: "Get ready to go into the army." I think that writing may help me to understand the feelings that seized me. A kind of joy and excitement, I admit. But at the same time, something like terror and pain. Because I shall have to leave my wife, Can, this love that is so sacred to me. We were married only four months ago and have been together so little. In accepting this separation, I am making a great sacrifice and denial. Dying does not frighten me: if my death helps my people, then I am ready to die. But to be parted from Can makes me suffer so much. Too much.

It is May 2nd. I have decided to keep a kind of diary. I am in my laboratory. My wife has heard that I am leaving soon. She knows that we have only forty hours together. Forty, that's all. They will be the most precious hours of our lives, because after them we shall be separated perhaps forever. What a painful dilemma; a soldier's life is noble, of course, but leaving the woman you love is so hard. Time is running through my fingers: a little longer and I shall not see her again. I now count every minute. And I ask so many questions: why we come into the world, why we have to suffer . . .

It is May 3rd. Can and I have spent all these hours together. Sometimes we talked animatedly, sometimes we were quite silent. In silence we wondered when we would meet again and if we would meet again. We can meet only when our country is reunited, if both of us survive the struggle. I am sad, too, that I will never see my parents, brothers and sisters again. I have no time to go see them to explain myself. Will they realize the difficulties I am struggling with? Oh, war . . . death . . . How ugly war is, how ugly death is. Soon I must leave, I am crying. I am not a coward. I feel resolved; in fact I feel strong. But I am a human being and I cannot give up my feelings. So I cry. Good-bye, my dearest. What a lot of things there are still to do. I must bring you the bicycle and some books. Let's hope Chien takes me in his car so I can put the bicycle on top of the car and . . . Can, your heart is in your eyes. A broken heart. But someday there won't be a single American devil left in this country. If it were not for the Americans we would not be kissing each other good-bye.

It is May 4th. I have said good-bye to my friends now. How many evenings we have spent together drinking tea, joy and pain. It was sad to leave them too. The good days are over. Army life is beginning.

It is May 5th. My first meal as a soldier. Today I feel as if I were a year older. I haven't got my uniform yet, but I feel confident and proud of myself. Now they are coming to organize us into squads and patrols and to give us camouflage material and food and water. We are leaving for Nghia Dau tonight, where I'll stay for seven or eight days. I am looking

at Phu Quy for the last time—this green forest, these enormous fields, this land I love so much. How many years have I lived here! I am leaving it and marching along road Number 15, with a good heavy pack on my back. It is dark now and the moon has risen. It will light up the column as we march.

It is May 7th. I have had only a few hours' sleep, I am worn out and the news that we are making a stop at Nghia Thi makes me very happy. I have asked permission to stop and see my brother Bay Luan, who lives nearby, which means I can send a message to my father.

It is May 8th. Today it is my turn to do the cooking and I have to find water. But after marching for two nights on end my legs are almost broken. Every movement I make causes terrific pain; I have never been good at sports. The meal I have to cook usually consists of vegetable soup, which helps the digestion, and rice. In the evening I have to cook more rice, which is pressed together into little balls and eaten on the march the next day. Actually tonight's march has been put off. Many of us are disappointed; we are impatient to reach our unit and find out what is going on. But the American planes keep diving down above the road, throwing flares, and have made it impossible for us to move. Just as well, really. I am so tired. I have been marching now for ten days, bearing with me all the love I have for what I have left behind. And that love is weighing on me so heavily. . . I miss Can terribly. I think of nothing else and count the days we've been separated.

It is May 9th. After the first squads had left, three American planes appeared and we heard their bombs exploding on the head of the column. An hour later

we reached the point but found no dead, only a cow lying on road Number 15. It was eerie in the darkness. It was the first creature I had seen killed in war.

It is May 10th. We have no rice and cannot buy any here because there is none. All we have eaten is the little rye and we have slept on empty stomachs. We shall have no rice until tomorrow evening and only then if things go well. Hunger is an ugly thing and I have no wish to write.

It is May 26th. I have been feeling ill for sixteen days and did not want to write. The march continues in the darkness, through unknown villages, and the American planes never let up. When you least expect them, they dive down and light you up with their flares. But today we have stopped; they have grouped us in squads to cut wood. For six hours I have been cutting wood. But that is nothing compared with the leeches. The moment we set foot in the jungle and in this damp climate we met our worst enemy—leeches. Curse them. They are everywhere; they cling to the first man they see. Although we are careful to cover every part of our bodies, they still manage to attack us and every time I feel a prick I know what it is. I take off my shoe and invariably my foot is covered with blood. Disgusting.

It is May 27th. My water bottle is empty, my shoulders are swollen and painful. It is a terrible effort to move one of the baskets. My feet are covered with cuts; I cannot go on like this. Our unit is armed only with rifles, and our task is to back up the infantry. So the baskets we are carrying on our backs are full of explosives, which are destined for the American dugouts and tanks. We live with the village people and

as the days pass they are becoming fond of us. But I have no news of Can.

It is June 1st. I have been in the army for nearly a month and all we do is train: to creep forward on hands and knees, to roll into holes, even to climb trees and hide among the leaves. These exercises are hard, and harder still because of the heat; even the wind that blows from Laos is hot. But this hard life has strengthened our ability to bear it. It has actually restored my enthusiasm. In the last three days we have had lectures in politics and some of us offered to go as volunteers into South Vietnam, through Laos, and there fight the American aggressor. I am one of them. But I miss Can and my mother. Tomorrow is a day of rest and I have asked permission to visit my home; my parents live not far from here. I was allowed to because I had volunteered to go to South Vietnam and at four in the afternoon I shall be leaving with Vi. We shall go to Trang Ke, zigzagging across the mountains. It will be a long march, but what does that matter? I feel wild with happiness; I shall see my mother and the rest of my family.

It is June 2nd. I have seen my relatives but not my mother. Oh, mother, how sad. When we arrived it was half-past eleven at night and my heart was beating fast. I embraced Van and my grandmother, my aunts and uncles and cousins, and then asked: "But what about Mother? Where is she?" She was not there. She had gone to Dong Noi that morning. Dearest Mother, you will suffer so much when they tell you I came and did not find you. I suffered as well. The family prepared a big meal for me, my first proper meal since I went into the army, but I was not hungry; I was thinking of you, Mother. Perhaps I shall not

have another chance like this one... I was so disappointed. I waited for you until midday, but you did not come and I had to leave. They had fixed balls of rice for me and other food, but I didn't care for any of it. When I said good-bye I was so moved that I could not hold back the tears... I went off through the trees, and the village gradually vanished, hidden by them, and I was sobbing. Even now the tears are falling on the paper. How sad it was, Mother. We have never been lucky, the two of us. I am now outside Vi's house, waiting for him to say good-bye to his parents, and then we will continue our journey.

It is June 7th. All day I have had an unbearable pain in my stomach. I went to rest in a house, looked at myself in the mirror and did not recognize myself. A month ago I was not so ugly. Now my cheekbones are protruding; the skin is so tight on them that my head looks like a skull. The fact is that I am not feeding myself. This evening I ate a little boiled rice, that was all. I could not get anything else down. I am tired, but all the same I am trying to write because I need to confide in someone. Even if it is only a piece of paper. Well, paper, everything in war is not ugly; you meet good people in war, like the members of the Thanh Long cooperative, in the village of Than Phong. Uncle Quy, Uncle Duong, Mr. Lam... dear people who care for us as if we were their family. And true Socialists; they share everything they have with us, from cups of tea to potatoes. I feel perfectly at ease with them and I shall remember them fondly as long as I live. But so many other things are ugly. The machine-gunning, the weariness, the pain in my stomach. My stomach hurts so much. I must stop writing. How on earth did I manage, before, to write every day?

It is July 4th. Two months! The months are going by and breaking my heart. I am suffering. Two months since I left and not a word from Can in these two months. It is hard to bear it. Did anything happen to her? Was our village bombed?

It is July 15th. This is a great day. I have had a letter from Can. My first letter from Can. My dearest Can is expecting a child.

It is July 17th. It is my birthday. All my other birthdays I celebrated at home. This time it has fallen on a Saturday. At home Saturday would have been a great day, but in war there is no difference between Saturday and Monday. I cannot even celebrate by resting; the commander has thought of organizing a show to raise morale and I have had to raise mine by working. I like to organize it, but I don't give a damn about the show.

It is July 18th. Did I tell you, my diary, that I have asked leave to go and see Can? I don't think so. I was so anxious to get it that I disliked even mentioning it. Well, I have got it! It is amazing. I heard yesterday evening. The commander called me and said: "I have a birthday present for you." I thought he was giving me something and I was rather moved. But when he exclaimed: "You have gotten your leave!" I was moved even more. I don't know what to say or what to add. I am losing my capacity to express myself in words. Perhaps I am being coarsened. Or is it joy? I am too happy. The journey will take ten days. For ten days I shall eat joy.

It is July 26th. I have been traveling for nearly a week, walking along road Number 7 at a speed of six kilometers an hour. This morning I ate only a bowl of rice, but I don't care; joy takes away my hunger. It takes me away from my fear as well: near Song I was machine-gunned by an American plane. But panic did not seize my legs as it did the day on the river with Vi. I flung myself into a hole and that was all. Now I am approaching

Dien Chau, where I was born. I shall arrive about four in the afternoon and they will tell me that my parents are still in the fields. I am so happy. Come, let's go on.

It is July 27th. I embraced my mother and father and my other relatives. I no longer even felt tired and I laughed when they said I had grown thin. I laughed . . . All I think about is the moment when I shall see my Can. I told myself: this is what I shall do, I shall walk a long way along the railroad track, then turn left along the river Tien, then I shall reach Hang Dua and take the bus to Phu Quy. It leaves at nine in the evening, so I shall travel in the bus until midnight and . . . I did not catch the bus at nine o'clock. I was there, but the bus was not. Ten o'clock came, then eleven and then midnight . . . Soon after midnight it arrived, but it was not going to Phu Quy. It was going to Vinh. I managed to get on a bus for Phu Quy only at one in the morning, and then it left at three. So I lost a whole night I might have spent with Can. It is now five in the morning, the bus is moving along in the darkness and I have just woken from a dream: I dreamed I was asleep in Can's arms. We hope to arrive before day because it is not wise to travel along these roads in the light. The passengers keep laughing and telling the driver: "Hurry, hurry! If Johnson sees us from the sky, he'll fire his bullets at us!"

It is July 28th. Perhaps it is silly to waste time writing a diary on a day like this, but just now she is asleep and I cannot sleep because I keep saying to myself: "I'm with her!" I want to tell you everything, my diary. The bus arrived at half-past five in the morning and I ran to the bridge. But the bridge was no longer there. It had been destroyed by bombs and they had put up another, made of boats, a hundred yards farther down. Finally I crossed the river. What a tragedy. The city has been completely smashed by American bombings. There is an enormous crater in the park and another very big one where the bookshop I used to go to had been. That street no longer exists. Only the foundations are left of Tay Nieu's restaurant, the commercial school, the cooperative and finally of my laboratory. A tragedy a thousand times worse than I feared. Nghia Dam, my dear Nghia, which was such a lively place, is now a ghost town. I wandered about the ruins in bewilderment, thinking that I had lived here, that I had worked here, but I saw nothing but holes and weeds. My diary, how much I suffered. I kept saying to myself: suppose Can is dead? As I was walking toward the farming headquarters, bewildered I met my friend Nung and asked him to carry my knapsack because I could not go on. He helped me home because I would have felt ill on my own. When we got near there I ran, rushed in, and shouted: "Can!" But Can was not there. I asked where she was. They said she was at the rubber plantation, next to the laboratory where I used to work. A bicycle, I said, a bicycle! They gave me one, I jumped on it and pedaled off. And there she was, coming toward me. I got off the bicycle and could only say: "Can!" We both wanted to throw our arms round each other. But we controlled ourselves; with so many people watching, it would have not looked right. So we just shook hands and stared at each other. Into each other's eyes. "How long will you stay?" Can asked. "Two days," I replied. "Only two days," she murmured. Yes, Can. All this journey on foot through the mountains, ten days' journey for only two days with you.

It is July 30th. I must leave this morning to reach my unit by tomorrow evening. In silence Can prepared my meal and some rice to eat on the way. It was dawn. In silence we ate our breakfast, staring at each other. My heart was broken and so was hers, I think. Soon I shall give her the last kiss, the last look, and then I shall go. All I do is repeat this to myself as she prepares to accompany me to the bus and I am writing just for something to do. To control myself. Not to get emotional while I wait. I shall go to Tay Hieu by bus and there get another bus. Good-bye, Can. I feel that this is the last time; I have a feeling that we shall not meet again. But wherever I go, however long I'll be away from you, perhaps until death, my love for you will stay the same.

It is August 31st. Another good-bye. I spend my life saying good-bye. By a stroke of luck I was able

to see my mother again. They sent us to get some ammunition near our village and so I slept at home and I had breakfast with my mother. But I had to leave her at eight in the morning. She walked along the road for a long way with me and wanted to carry my knapsack. It was heavy, but I let her carry it because I understood it made her happy to do so. Then she put it back on my shoulders with a caress and we parted. Without saying a single word. It was as if we had nothing more to say to each other except our pain.

It is October 18th. I hardly ever speak to you now, my diary. I am not the same man I was. We have started fighting and I am no longer the same man. Each time we fight I think I shall not survive, that I shall die, and when I find I am still alive I feel a kind of surprise and disbelief. After five months in the army I feel I have really sacrificed all for my country: my family, my work, my happiness.

It is October 23rd. When we have to climb rocky hills as we did today my stick becomes a real friend. You can count the kilometers better: five . . . four . . . three . . . two . . . one . . . and the camp! Sometimes when we reach the camp I do not even want to write; I go straight to sleep. And it is hard waking up again. Luckily when we are going through the villages people help us to carry our loads. The girls especially. They divided among them the things I was carrying and carried them for fifteen kilometers, along the path. With

such grace and strength. Now we are resting in preparation for the night march. It is better to march at night; then the American planes do not see us. Sometimes I wonder what their flares are for.

It is October 26th. After we had eaten at Pham Thi we reached Nam Lien. This is the birthplace of Uncle Ho—that is, our leader, Ho Chi Minh. While I was on my way to the Lien Tuong cooperative, to see my friend, Truong, I passed Uncle Ho's house. It consists of two simple huts covered with rice straw and surrounded by a bamboo fence. I have always wanted to see the house where Uncle Ho was born and it made quite an impression on me. The windows are shaded by pretty bamboo blinds and there was an old banana tree on the right. There was also a grapefruit tree and an orange. It seemed to me an important place, although it was very, very small.

It is November 5th. I have had three letters from Can. All together. As soon as we reached Son Ninh, I went to a shop where they take photographs and had one taken to send her. I wrote to her as well. And then I wrote to my father, to my sister Lang and to my friend Thuoc the bookseller. But I do not enjoy writing. I am too exhausted and depressed. Perhaps I should stop writing this diary. What use is it?

It is December 23rd. We have spent sixty days in this damned place called Son Ham, all in training for the mission ahead of us. Today we start the long march and I keep wondering where we are going and what we are going to do and what this mission is about that everyone keeps talking of. It seems important, yet no one has the slightest idea what it is all about. We have to do at least two hundred kilometers on foot. Just to think of it makes me feel

ili. Two hundred kilometers over mountains, along streams, carrying my knapsack and gun and ammunition. I cannot bear to think of it. I have taken up my diary again in order to relieve the tension.

It is December 24th. We started marching again at five in the morning, when it was still dark. I am so tired that my legs are aching. The terrain is still dangerous; we go along small paths right on the edge of steep cliffs. When we reach a house belonging to a peasant he lets us in to rest. But what sort of life is this? To love my country costs me a lot.

It is December 25th. It is Christmas, Jesus Christ! It is Christmas and I am carrying a gun on my back. A fine Christmas. We have marched for three days in the jungle and the mosquitoes have taken full advantage of it. I also fell and twisted my ankle. It is now swollen and so is my leg. And my feet are covered with blisters. We went back onto the main road and then walked along the railroad track, taking advantage of the darkness. The rain grew heavier and heavier and seemed to be poking holes in our faces. Then at three in the morning we had to wade through a very cold river. We reached a Catholic village in Chu Le district at sunrise. Now we have stopped here for rice and to rest a little. We will start out again at one in the morning, but my feet are so swollen that I wonder if I shall be able to follow my unit till the end. The rain continues and many parts of the road have been destroyed by bombs. Bridges as well. The Americans do not spare us here. The sight of all this ruin makes me feel worse and often I would like to stop by the roadside to catch my breath. But then I have to run to catch up with the others, and my ankle hurts, it hurts... They have given us nylon bandages to bind up our legs and protect us from the leeches. But I simply cannot go on, I

cannot... Oh, what a terrible Christmas! And what about Can? What is she doing? How is she? Is the child growing well inside her? It is strange, I think continuously of Can but in a different way. A kind of rarefied way.

It is December 29th. Seventh day on the march. Usually we are up before dawn so as to walk when it is dark but cool. It would not be so bad if my ankle did not hurt so much. Sometimes my comrades carry my gun for me, but even this does not help much. If we are not going through the jungle, through the leeches, we are climbing mountains. Luckily, in these parts there are tunnels. These are long passages cut into the mountain; of course I had heard of them, but I had never seen them. You can walk through them quite well, but it is completely dark. You have to keep talking to stay in touch with the others. At a certain point it becomes a bit stifling. Like that tunnel that was two hundred yards long. We could not get into it; it was blocked by the rubble that had fallen during a raid. So we had to go up over the mountain and it was raining. It is still raining and every time my ankle makes me trip I fall on the ground and it takes almost five minutes for me to get on my feet again. I console myself by thinking that the human can do anything, can conquer distances and leeches and an aching body.

It is December 30th. When we saw a house, Li and I took off our equipment and went in to ask for food. The owner gave us a pan of freshly cooked potatoes and a bunch of bananas. We ate until we nearly burst and then called Nuoi and Mai to give them the rest. We wanted to pay him, but the good man refused. He even offered us a cup of hot water to help us digest the food. His kindness put us into a good mood

and when we reached the ferry we felt like joking around. Li called out the password, "Son!" in the darkness. Someone answered with the other password, "Sam!" Then I shouted, "Long live Uncle Ho!" And Li said, "You idiot! D'you want them to hear you?" My ankle is hurting much less and tomorrow is the last day of this long march. How dirty we are! We stink disgustingly. I'm longing for a wash. Just think of having a hot bath. The sea is now only a few miles away.

It is January 9th. Today is a very important day for me because it is the first anniversary of my wedding. A year! No one could call Can and me a lucky couple. After our marriage we were together for only four months and in those four months we spent most of the time twelve miles apart, because I was working at the laboratory. In fact, we met only at weekends and on holidays. Then I was called up and saw Can for those two days, three months later, and then never again. What a cruel fate for people who love! I wonder what my dear Can is doing. I hope nothing has happened to her. I must admit that for weeks I did not think of her much, I felt so bad, but now I have been dreaming about her again. And as we approach Tet* my longing for her is like a thorn in my heart. This will be my first Tet away from home. I wish Tet did not exist, because it only makes me suffer. And I have to keep this suffering to myself. I have only my diary to confide in. Great loneliness lies ahead of me. And then perhaps death.

It is January 14th. People keep saying that something big is being prepared. We have plenty of weapons and are short of food. When we pass through the villages the people are still asleep. Each of us is carrying at least fifty-two kilos on his back, which include ammunition, rice, etc. At dawn we are exhausted. We hide and rest until five in the afternoon and then the march starts up again. But where are we going?

It is January 18th. Only a few days more and then we shall celebrate Tet. Suddenly we have been ordered not to stop in houses, not even to go inside them. Something new is in the air. We must keep silently marching. So while other people are gaily celebrating Tet we shall have to hide quietly in the woods. I remember the last Tet; Can and I spent it together. We were happy.

It is January 20th. Our ration of meat has been tripled. What a lot of food they are giving us. It is strange, though, that each man eats in silence. As if lost in his own thoughts. At midday we were on the march again. I was carrying a small cannon on my back. We have been told to be very quiet. We always move in darkness and when it rains the road is slippery. Loaded as we are, we take two hours to cover two kilometers. Slipping about with a small cannon on your back is not pleasant.

It is January 22nd. I can say proudly that today is the day we have begun to work on a road to liberate South Vietnam, the first road we've built. It is still raining, but each one of us is determined to carry out his great mission to the very end. The 13th Company has the honor of heading the column. From now on I shall have a new address, 8757 HS. I have written to tell Can. In the jungle I picked and ate some delicious figs.

*Tet: Vietnamese New Year. This was probably the year of the "Tet Offensive" [1968], a major victory for the National Liberation Front.

It is January 23rd. Suddenly we heard planes and someone shouted: "They're bombing us." A second later a plane dived straight above us, then came a terrific explosion and fragments of the bomb hit everywhere. One passed not four centimeters from my head. I heard it whistling. What mysterious laws govern a man's life and survival? If my head had been four centimeters further in that direction, I would have been killed. Does everything happen by chance? After the whistle I ran and crouched in a hole that was only about eighteen inches deep, while the bombs kept falling. I ran to another hole and found a comrade covered in blood. I gasped: "Are you wounded?" "Yes," he answered. I went closer to him and realized that one of his feet was almost blown off. Only a piece of skin joined it to the leg. I took off my shirt and tied it tightly round his leg to stop the bleeding. Then I called for a medic and together we dragged him under a tree. The foot was dangling this way and that, like the pendulum of a clock. The medic then cut through the piece of skin and tossed the foot away. The odd thing was it did not upset me much. I was more upset by the cow lying there in the road, dead that first night. Perhaps because it was the first creature I had ever seen killed. When the bombs stopped falling, there was a lot of smoke around us. I walked around a bit and found bomb craters all around the hole in which I had been hiding. I can hardly believe it, but I have escaped. Clearly it is not my destiny to die here. Where is it written that I am to die?

It is January 26th. We got up very early and had breakfast before dawn. Everything is ready. I wrote a letter to Can and gave it to a friend who has just come back from Thailand and I hope he will manage to get it to her. Can, my dearest Can. Perhaps the

end is waiting for me, but there will never be an end to our love. Even if I die or you die it will not end. Can, my dear Can. Now we must go. The commander is calling us and telling us to . . .

February 19th. The diary stops here. He must have died five or six days later, on the outskirts of Saigon. At Than Son Nhut, perhaps, where there were North Vietnamese troops. Or else he may have died on January 26 itself, in a bombing raid like the one I went on with Captain Andy in the A-37. I can't think of anything else. And I keep wondering: "Does Can know about his death?" Perhaps she has just received his last letter and is writing to him at his new address: 8757 HS. I even spoke about it to the officials at Vietnam Documents and Research Notes—that is, the people who translate and catalogue these little books. They laughed at me and said I was too romantic, I was like the Vietcong whose diary sounds like Neopolitan songs, always talking about love. That made them think of something. Would I like to read one of those diaries about love, they asked. I said yes, I would, and here it is. It was captured on last February 6 by a patrol of the Third Division Marine Corps in the province of Quang Tri, and this time it was not by an unknown soldier. His name is in the book: Le Vanh Minh, born on May 25, 1942, at Quang Binh. He died just two weeks ago.

LE VANH MINH

Tuyet Lan, my darling! I should not have sent you such a sad letter, I know. I should have thought that it would only make you unhappy. So I ask you to forgive me. It will not happen again, my love. But I cannot stop writing to you, and so do you know what I shall do? I shall write to you just the same and keep the letters in my diary and then give them to you the day we meet again. Today I need you more than ever, because today is the anniversary of the day someone came to the political education camp of Ha Tay and pressed my arm and said: "Be strong, Le Vanh Minh, your parents are dead." I began trembling, then weeping like a child; you know how much I loved them. Even at the camp of Ha Tay my mother used to send me poems. I read them again and suffering chokes me. In this suffering, I think of the day I left at dawn and you came with me to the river Hien Loung, which divides our country into two. I was biting my lips, do you remember? I was thinking that from that moment it would also be dividing us; no one knew for how long. Until our country is reunited and spring has burst out again with lotus flowers instead of bombs. Here in the South it is still winter: our people are lying dead under the enemy's heel; many of us are already dead and buried. But they fought well, didn't they? Good-bye for now, Tuyet Lan. I always have your photograph over my heart. Be faithful to me.

Tuyet Lan, my dear. Rivers and mountains keep us apart and yet I seem to see you at every crossroads, behind every clump of grass and every tree. A swallow flies toward our village. I ask him to carry you my love and to ask you to wait patiently for me. You are suffering, but so is South Vietnam. Its sobs rise from every rice field, from every coconut tree, from every canal. The river Hien Luong divides not only us but so many others who love. And if you really love me, you too must help in this struggle. So that I shall be proud of the photograph you gave me. Happiness must come to both of us and to all who weep as we do.

Tuyet Lan, my darling! I should like to write you an August poem to celebrate your birthday, your twenty years. And I should like its verses to contain all my love for you and all my hatred for the enemy. Accept this letter as a poem. It is your birthday today, isn't it? You are in the spring of life and revolutionary passion. You will grow with it, and with it grows my tenderness for you. I feel I left you only a moment ago: my hungry eyes still follow your white dress as you move away and your hair waving like the palm trees in our villages. My love is so exuberant; and it is as sweet as the scent of the lotus flower, as fresh as the water of a stream, as precious as the sun that gilds the earth. It helps me when I see the bombs falling on my country and tears running down a woman's face. It makes me stand up against the Americans like a mountain against a storm. It makes me strong as a river sweeping its refuse—the Americans—to the sea. I feel like the mountain Chi Linh and the river Bach Dang, which bear traces of other defeated enemies. How many enemies have invaded our country? For how many centuries have we

been fighting? And what a brave country ours is.
We shall destroy the new enemy, Tuyet Lan.

In the shade of a coconut tree I am thinking of you, Tuyet Lan. We are at Tri Thien in the province of Quang Tri and before me is the river Ven Hai with white beaches along its banks. It is an autumn morning and I am homesick. Actually I am always homesick, even when I am eating or on the march. And everytime I see a red flower my homesickness grows, because you love red flowers. When you see them, you call out softly. Ah, if only we could live together, even here. It is beautiful here, you know. The line of the mountains is beautiful, the green of the forests is beautiful and so is the fluttering of the birds, the trembling of the leaves. I would like to paint apricot trees, tufts of bamboo and orchid petals. But in the evening a sinister silence falls over everything. And what was delightful becomes horrible. And I miss you desperately, Tuyet Lan.

I am still not sending these letters, Tuyet Lan. But what a sacrifice it is! If you are really so strong, why can you not read my letters from time to time, Tuyet Lan? Why do you make me keep them like this? What is the point of writing to you if you do not see what I write? They might kill me, Tuyet Lan, and then my letters would be lost and you would never read them. Are you in good health, Tuyet Lan? Are you faithful to me? You must remain faithful, Tuyet Lan. The fighting will not last long, you will see. Wait for me, Tuyet Lan. One day I shall be back. I promise you, my darling.

I have written a poem for my mother, Tuyet Lan. But she will never read it. So I am putting it aside for you.

Dear mother! I call you but you are so far
away,
I call you and a deer replies.
He came running to me, through the forest,
he was breathless as you were when the
bombs fell,
when you called for help and no one heard you,
and your heart broke into a thousand pieces.
Whom shall I give my love to now, Mother?
There is only one mother, no one can take
her place.
Sometimes I dream of coming home, Mother.
I go back in my dream, but there is nothing
left,
only bomb-holes that stir me to vengeance.
Our house is destroyed, disappeared,
and it was so beautiful, Mother.
We used to read the story of Kim Van Kieu
and we found it the saddest story in the world.
We did not know sadness, remember?
Sadness means lighting candles:
a candle for you and a candle for Father.
I have brought three candles,
the third one is for me, for my tomb.
I feel like Loc Van Tien the Mandarin.
When he came home with his Mandarin's rank,
he found his mother was dead, only his girl
was alive:
Nuyet Nga who had waited for him ten years.
And he wept so much that he became blind..
So I send you my hatred for those who killed you.
The river may dry, the mountain may break,
I shall have my revenge, Mother.
It does not matter if they kill me afterwards,
and no one lights this stick on my grave.

Tuyet Lan, my darling. I know you do not want to hear me talking of hatred, but how can I possibly not feel it? I know you believe in forgiveness, but how can I sink to that? I think of nothing but this—destroying the Americans. And I think even a stone, or a child, may help to do that. This is why I ask you to take part enthusiastically in the Resistance. You may say that you are not suited to it. Reality does not seem to suit you. Your hair is as soft as the surface of this stream, your hands are as tender as the petals of this flower, your shoulders are as fragile as the threads of this spider's web, Tuyet Lan; but you must do it, all the same. And then your next birthday, all your birthdays, will be gayer, and you will forget that you grew up amid bloodshed and explosions. Do not be downcast, my love, leave that to me. Difficulties teach us how to live, they help us to grow. Now look, we are camped in a forest: it is cold and raining and we are all chilled and soaking. But if I did not fight what sort of a man would I be? I would not even be a man, just a chilled, useless object. I ask you to feel what I feel. But it is all useless, my love, because you will not read what I write.

The sound of a flute is enough to take me back to my rivers and to the sailing boats skimming through the water, to you and to the dimples on your lovely cheeks. If you do not want to fight, Tuyet Lan, do not do so. I don't mind; all I care is that you stay alive and wait for me and are faithful to me. Because if anything should happen to you I would throw myself in front of the first machine gun I met.

Am I silly, my love, Tuyet Lan? I wrote a poem for you as well. The other guerrillas tease me when they see me bending over my paper. They say: he is writing a poem, he is writing another poem! But I let

them talk, and write and rewrite it until I am satisfied with what I read. I am satisfied with this; in fact, I have copied it out without any corrections. Here it is, Tuyet Lan. It speaks of you and of our village. Really, the two of you are the same thing.

It is at Quang Binh, my beloved village,
that the rivers run best,
that the coconut trees throw the longest
shadows,
that the marine pines give the biggest cones,
landing with small, polite thuds.
It is at Quang Binh that the green is greenest,
and the winds carry the scent of growing rice,
and the herons cover the fields with their
white wings,
and the sand slides against you like a caress.
Because at Quang Binh is you.
My memory returns to Quang Binh,
and I remember a girl from the North,
the days I lived with her,
sharing sweetness and bitterness.
The road to Revolution is long and hard,
but victory will come, girl from the North.
We shall free this country of ours,
we shall unify it again, so as never to lose
it again.
I shall go back to Quang Binh, my grief will
disappear,
and the hatred the bombs have put into my
memory
with the smoke of fires, with the explosions.
All this will be over, Tuyet Lan, I swear.
And again the boats will go out into the
open sea,
again the rice fields will be kissed by the
wind,

while we listen to the melancholy notes of a
flute.
Shouldering guns, the soldiers go to fight
the Americans for this. That is, for you,
Tuyet Lan.

I don't believe it, Tuyet Lan. It isn't true, Tuyet Lan. They came and told me that you are dead, Tuyet Lan. They told me you were killed like my mother, in a bombing. I don't believe it, Tuyet Lan. It is too much, Tuyet Lan. I cannot bear it, Tuyet Lan. It must be a mistake, Tuyet Lan. If not, I shall go mad. You are alive, Tuyet Lan, you are well, and we shall meet again, Tuyet Lan, we shall walk again on the bank of the Lake of the Swan, and the Gulf of the Yellow Star, where there is always a little breeze. That breeze you like so much, which ruffles your hair, Tuyet Lan. We shall look into each other's eyes, your hand in mine, and we shall never leave each other again. There shall be no more farewells on the river, Tuyet Lan. Tuyet Lan, Tuyet Lan, Tuyet Lan! I am dreaming, Tuyet Lan. You are dead. We shall meet again but in another world, if there is one, when I am dead myself. Because now there is nothing left for me, Tuyet Lan. And I don't care about anything, anymore. They have asked me to go on a patrol and I am going. To die.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1-a. How would you answer the question "Why are you participating in this war?" if you were one of the NLF soldiers? Frank Elkins? Bruce Anello?

1-b. Describe the doubts or conflicts you might feel, again comparing answers.

2. The unknown NLF soldier writes, "If my death helps my people, then I am ready to die." Are there any circumstances under which you could make the same statement? If so, describe what these circumstances would be.

3. How do the villagers in these diaries feel about the Vietnamese soldiers? How do the soldiers feel about the villagers? Why?

Do You Think?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Ask a Vietnam veteran that you know to read Bruce Anello's diary and compare it with his own experiences. You may also want to raise some of the questions that came out of the class discussions and see how his answers compare to the ones you came up with.

Read one of the books listed under "Suggestions for Further Study" and report back to the class. For example:

—Compare Rick Springman's story with George Smith's (P.O.W.: Two Years With The Vietcong), pages 73-108.

—Compare the six poems by GIs in this book with these poems from We Promise One Another: "Invasion," "What a Sight! 550,000 GIs in Viet Nam," "Let Us Stand Up," "A Guerilla's Tale," and "The Present."

—Compare William Calley's account of the My Lai massacre with what came out at the Army's investigation (skim Cover-Up: The Army's Secret Investigation Of The Massacre At My Lai 4, pages 147-195, for details).

—Select the testimony of five GIs from "And All of Them Can Be Killed And Most of Them Are Killed," in The Winter Soldier Investigation.

—Listen to testimony in "Missing In Action" on the record "Winter Soldier II" and compare it with Frank Elkins.

Role play the following imaginary scenes, or others involving soldiers from the book. After one group of actors has improvised the scene as they think it might develop, discuss their interpretation and let another group show how they think these men would relate to each other. (You may want to add other characters.)

If a scene seems especially interesting, some students might develop it into a written play to present before other classes.

a. Rick Springman is a member of Bruce Anello's company. Bruce returns from leave determined not to take up his gun and discusses his decision with Rick and David Lang.

b. Gerald Snead and David Parks are assigned to Firebase Pace. Two white GIs approach them about signing the petition to Senator Kennedy.

c. Frank Elkins' plane is shot down and he is taken prisoner by Le Vanh Minh and the other NLF soldier whose diaries we read. Through an interpreter the three of them discuss why they are fighting, their feelings about the war and their families, etc.

(One difficulty in this assignment is that some of the soldiers were writing early in the war and others years later, when attitudes had changed considerably. You may either try to overlook this difference or to play a character as you think he would have been at the later time—for example, David Parks as he would be in 1972 rather than as he was in 1967.)

Several of you may want to read through Winter Soldier Investigation and do a dramatic reading of it for the rest of the class, rewriting parts to make it more appropriate for oral reading.

A group of you may want to plan a discussion that the whole class participates in, based on the following questions:

How did racial stereotypes affect the attitudes and actions of white soldiers toward Asians? Of Black and white soldiers toward each other? Of Black soldiers toward Asians?

The following selections from books listed in the bibliography may be useful in planning the discussion: "You've Gotta Go To Vietnam, You've Gotta Kill The Gooks," pages 5 and 6 in Winter Soldier Investigation; "Beyond Vietnam" by Martin Luther King Jr., pages 81-91 in Vietnam and Black America.

One explanation for United States military involvement in Vietnam is "opposition to communism." How would you define communism?

After the Mylai massacre, Lt. Calley said, "we weren't in Mylai to kill human beings, really. We were there to kill an ideology." Do you agree that this was why the United States was in Vietnam? If you agree, explain why you would or would not support this policy. What other reasons might account for United States involvement in Vietnam?

Do a drawing, painting, collage, sculpture or poem showing your response to the stories in the booklet. Focus on one of the following themes: A Pawn in the Game; How did the "heroes" feel about themselves?; What were we fighting for in Vietnam?

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

P.O.W.: Two Years With The Vietcong, George Smith.
Personal account by a young Green Beret held captive by the National Liberation Front for two years. Tells of his younger life, his boot camp days, experiences as a POW and his return home.
Ramparts Press, 1971. Distributed by Monthly Review, 32 W. 14th Street, New York 10011.

Winning Hearts and Minds, Edited By Larry Rottmann, Jan Barry, and Basil T. Paquet.
Poems by American soldiers in Vietnam. Powerful and direct.
McGraw-Hill, 1973.

Flower Of The Dragon: The Breakdown Of The United States Army In Vietnam, Richard Boyle.
Talks about the war from the perspective of the "grunts." Looks at drugs, mutinees, deserters, the Green Berets.
Ramparts Press, 1973. Distributed by Monthly Review.

Nothing, And So Be It, Oriana Fallaci, translated by Isabel Quigly.
An Italian woman journalist travels with American troops in Vietnam and gives her impressions of the war. Provides a clear picture of what it is like to be living and fighting in Vietnam. Written in terse, exciting style.
Doubleday, 1972.

Vietnam And Black America, An Anthology of Protest and Resistance, Edited by Clyde Taylor.
An anthology of poems, speeches, articles, journals, and statements by Black Americans who opposed the war "as a natural expression of a personally felt concern for human rights and racial justice."
Anchor Books/Anchor Press/Doubleday, Garden City, New Jersey, 1973.

Cover-Up: The Army's Secret Investigation Of The Massacre At My Lai 4, Seymour M. Hersch.
Based on official transcripts and documents of the military investigation with judgments and additional information supplied by Mr. Hersch, the journalist who first brought the massacre to light.
Vintage Books, 1972.

Winter Soldier Investigation, Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW).
Transcript from an inquiry into American war-crimes held by the VVAW in 1971. Testimony of 75 veterans.
Beacon Press, 1972.

The Opium Trail: Heroin and Imperialism, Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars.
Discusses addiction in the United States and in the Army. Looks at Southeast Asia as a major source of opium and discusses how the United States is involved in the sale and traffic of this drug.
Available from New England Free Press 60 Union Square, Somerville, Massachusetts, 02143. 1972. $.25.

We Promise One Another: Poems From An Asian War, Indochina Mobile Education Project, 1971.
A collection of contemporary and traditional Vietnamese poems by students, soldiers, and folk singers. The poems deal with themes such as love of country, devotion to family, and the struggle against foreign domination.
Available from Indochina Mobile Education Project, P.O. Box 39013, Washington, D.C. 20016. $2.00.

Record: "Winter Soldier II"
Testimony by Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Boston, Massachusetts, October, 1971. "Missing in Action" is stories of men who were bomber pilots; "Air War/1984," testimonies about the George Orwell-like electronic battlefield.
Rounder Records, 186 Willow Avenue, Somerville, Massachusetts 02144. $1.00.

Slide Show: "The Electronic Battlefield"
How GIs were replaced by an intricate system of sensors, computers, and remote-controlled bombers. Slides, script and documentation for use with Kodak Carousel projector.
NARMIC (National Action Research on the Military-Industrial Complex), American Friends Service Committee, 48 Inman Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139 or 1125 16th Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102. $10 rental, $50 purchase.

Slide show: "The Post—War War"
Documents how the war has continued since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1973 including the transformation of American military personnel into civilian workers on Pentagon contracts. Slides, script and documentation for use with Kodak Carousel projector.
NARMIC $10 rental; $50 purchase.

Film: "Vietnam: Still America's War"
British documentary which details the continuing suffering of the Vietnamese people from the ongoing war. 16mm color, 26 minutes.
May be rented from AFSC or from Clergy and Laity Concerned (CALC), 235 East 49th Street, New York, NY 10017, for $10.

Film: "Introduction to the Enemy"
Tom Hayden and Jane Fonda, members of the Indochina Peace Campaign (IPC), interview people in North Vietnam and the areas of South Vietnam controlled by the Provisional Revolutionary Government about their experiences during the war and their hopes for restoring their country. 16mm color, 60 minutes.
IPC, 181 Pier Avenue, Santa Monica, CA 90405.

"What Every Vietnam Veteran Knows," Philip Scribner Balboni, *The New Republic*, December 19, 1970, Vol. 163, No. 25.
Interviews with other veterans who witnessed other incidents similar to Mylai.

"Two Pilots, Two Wars," Steven V. Roberts, *New York Times Magazine*, June 10, 1973.
Contrasts the attitudes of a pilot in World War II, who firmly believes in what he did, with a pilot during the war in Vietnam, whose faith was shaken by his experience.

Unfamiliar Words

AK	Chinese-made rifles.
APC	Armored Personnel Carrier, a light-weight tank without a gun turret.
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam. Its government is based in the south of Vietnam, mainly in the city of Saigon. ARVN is fighting with the aid of the United States military and is financed by the American government.
AWOL	Absent—Without—Leave.
B—52	A huge, eight—engine bomber which carries as many as 108 500—pound bombs per plane.
Basic	Basic training, the period at the beginning of military training.
Body count	The number of Vietnamese reported killed in a military operation. Body count was one of the measures of success of a mission.
Bunker	A fortified shelter, often below ground, built of reinforced concrete and sand bags.
CIA	United States Central Intelligence Agency, the government agency responsible for foreign espionage.
CO	Commanding Officer.
Chain of Command	Decisions are supposed to be sent from the top (from the generals) to the field officers; that is, along the chain of command.
Chopper	Helicopter.
Dink	Insulting word used by GI's to describe the Vietnamese. Probably comes from "dinky," which means small and insignificant.
Flak	Bursting shells from artillery.
Gook	Insulting word used by GI's to describe the Vietnamese.
Grunts	Army infantry or ground soldiers.
Honcho	Person with power who throws his weight around.
Hootch	Slang used by GI'S to describe their living quarters or Vietnamese homes in the countryside.
KP	Kitchen Patrol, kitchen duty in the Army.
Lifer	Career soldier.
M—16	Standard U.S. Army rifle.
MP	Military police.
Mamasan	Slang used by GI's referring to older Asian women.
'Nam	GI slang for Vietnam.
Napalm	Jellied gas which sticks to the skin as it burns.
NCO	Non-commissioned officer; that is, a soldier up to the rank of Sergeant Major.
NLF	National Liberation Front, a coalition of groups in the south of Vietnam fighting for freedom from foreign control of South Vietnam. They are supported by North Vietnam.
OCS	Officer Candidate School, the training school for U.S. Army officers.
Papasan	Slang used by GI's referring to older Asian men.
Pentagon	United States military headquarters in Washington, D.C.
PFC	Private First Class
Platoon	A small group of soldiers; a subdivision of a company.
POW	Prisoner of War.
Purple Heart	Decoration awarded to a soldier wounded in action.
R & R	Rest and Rehabilitation, the two—week leave given to GI's at the mid—point of their 13—month stay in Vietnam.
Search & Destroy Mission	United States military operation intended to clear an area of all people and buildings.
Viet Cong, or VC	Term used by the United States military and the American press referring to the soldiers of the National Liberation Front.

My Country

I am Whitey; they call me pimples;
eighteen and from Nebraska,
stalking the enemy
in the mud of the Delta. Eyes focused
on the back of my neck.
Flying ants in the food, mosquito sucking blood on my
wrist, chiggers between my toes, and,
the enemy behind the trees.
There are no wheat fields in the Delta.

They call me Chico because they do not know:
I am Jose Maria of the barrio.
The Texas Captain calls me greaser
and gives me ribbons and medals for killing V.C.,
little yellow men nobody can see.
I kill to live,
at home I am the one they cannot see.

They call me Chopper Jockey:
Below in the jungle, carpeted
with blood of men I have killed, I see the
faces of men I have never seen.
Daily riding the clouds, appointed scythe-swinger of
the aluminum age,
silvery engines of slaughter: hellfire raining from above.
Dead and dying are the same.

I am the Texas Captain, Korea's ribbons on my chest;
we burn a village and return—a week's ground gained
in a day, lost to the night.
They're still firing, call for the planes.
There's blood on my shirt; a medic. I'm
dying, save me.

I am America.
I am America dying in Asia.

—William J. Simon

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